The Foundations of Faith

THE COLE LECTURES

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The Cole Lectures for 1921
delivered before Vanderbilt University

The Foundations of Faith

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THE COLE LECTURES

THE late Colonel E. W. Cole of Nashville, Tennessee, donated to Vanderbilt University the sum of five thousand dollars, afterwards increased by Mrs. E. W. Cole to ten thousand, the design and conditions of which gift are stated as follows:

"The object of this fund is to establish a foundation for a perpetual Lectureship in connection with the School of Religion of the University, to be restricted in its scope to a defense and advocacy of the Christian religion. The lectures shall be delivered at such intervals, from time to time, as shall be deemed best by the Board of Trust; and the particular theme and lecturer will be determined by the Theological Faculty. Said lecture shall always be reduced to writing in full, and the manuscript of the same shall be the property of the University, to be published or disposed of by the Board of Trust at its discretion, the net proceeds arising therefrom to be added to the foundation fund, or otherwise used for the benefit of the School of Religion."

Preface

MANY volumes have been written upon the subject of these lectures, and it would be a very pleasant task and by no means a difficult one to gather together and sum up opinions old and new upon their main thesis, the relation between faith and authority. The present volume, however, does not offer this to its readers. It brings with it a few old problems under whatever new light may come from the experience of a long ministry. For thirty years the writer has been watching the play of religious truth upon the minds of men, and his reading of theological results has been revised in the light of innumerable experiences. In this way he trusts that he may be able to present formal questions at least from some new angles of vision and in some new groupings.

Above everything else, this is a book of reconciliations. In one sense controversy forwards the progress of thought, but no one who has watched the history of recent religious developments can question the extraordinary wastage and delay which have been occasioned

by unnecessary controversies. Of recent years theological discussions have hindered progress and discovery by distracting the attention of scholars and occupying the minds of the unscholarly with many subjects which are of comparatively little importance, and which might have been settled either one way or another without affecting in the slightest degree any religious truth. One may go further and say that to a large extent it is even true that apparently opposite schools mean precisely the same thing. It is altogether amazing how much of our divergence is simply a matter of expression, and how little essential difference there is between earnest men concerning the deepest truths. These lectures are an attempt to get below the surface of controversy to the common facts of religious experience on which all Christian men may meet and hold communion.

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LECTURE I

THE FOUNDATIONS OF FAITH

For He hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods.—PSALM 24: 2.

THESE words are traditionally associated with the story of the bringing of the ark to Zion, and the establishment of the throne of David in the conquered Jebusite city of Jerusalem. It is peculiarly interesting that Israel's creative idea should be introduced in this fashion on such an occasion. The object appears to have been to exhibit the theocracy as the great end and aim of creation, and thus to exalt alike the throne of David and the God of Israel.

Yet it is not in connection with that great historic conception that the text has forced itself upon the beginning of these lectures. I have found no other expression of the thing I want to say so picturesque and arresting as that which is given in these words. The Psalmist, in his search for the foundations of the Kingdom of Israel, has gone back to those conceptions which are so charmingly described in the first chapter of Genesis. In that chap-

ter we see God entering upon the chaos and the watery abyss of the beginning for the purpose of distinctions. He separates the light from the darkness, the heaven from the earth, and the dry land from the sea.

The earth, as the Hebrews thought of it, floats like a disc upon the surface of the seas, after the manner of an iceberg. "The Great Deep" is literally the waters which are under the earth. To the Greek imagination the ocean was a river flowing round about the world, and in certain ancient maps this river is thus depicted; but the Hebrew conceived of it as a vast lake, not only around the disc of earth, but actually underneath it. As for the disc itself, in the submerged part of it there is located the great hollow of Sheol. This is an immense cave, the abode of the spirits of the dead. Above Sheol, on the surface of the disc, is the world we know, with man living his life upon it. Beneath all lies the Great Deep, whose waters are laid up there in the huge storehouses referred to in the thirty-third psalm. Into this bottomless Deep the roots of the mountains pierce down like anchors, holding the earth stable. It is to this region that the song of Jonah refers when the prophet says, *I went down to the bottom of the mountains, the earth with her bars closed upon me*

forever. It is interesting to glance over the older commentaries upon this passage. Delitsch remarks that the earth has waters for basis and would sink down into them but for God's supporting power. Matthew Henry in a very characteristic passage writes, "A weak and unstable foundation (one would think) to build the earth upon; and yet, if the Almighty power please, it shall serve to bear the weight of the earth. The waters, which at first covered it, were ordered under it, that dry land might appear, and so they are as a foundation to it."

There was much in the geography of Palestine to confirm such a theory as this. All deep wells and springs (and there are many of them in Palestine and the neighbouring country) suggested a passage connecting down to the Deep. Also in certain places, like the Springs of the Jordan, you have full-bodied rivers, or at least considerable streams, suddenly emerging from the earth at some cave in a mountainside, or even bubbling up from beneath in pools that lie in the plains. Most significant and striking of all are those underground waters of the Negeb, or south country, which are heard but never seen. The traveller, putting his ear to a crack in the ground in these regions, may so constantly hear the sound of

running waters far beneath, as to receive the impression that he is walking dry-shod above a vast network of river courses in the heart of the earth. It is no wonder if the Hebrews held this mysterious Deep in great horror, calling it by strange names such as Dragon, Serpent, Rahab and Leviathan. They were land-dwellers who had no hereditary experience of the sea, and who associated with the conception of great waters all that was mysterious, remote from life, and horrible.

One thing especially is to be remembered about this curious cosmogony. It affords a good sample of the way in which scientific ideas arose in primitive times. They were not speculations based upon material facts and geological studies, but the reflections of the mental and spiritual moods of those who adopted them. It was the inner world that gave its form to the outer, and not the outer to the inner. All primitive physical science is really constructed upon the model of man's thoughts and feelings about life. When an ancient man writes, *He hangeth the earth upon nothing*, we have an excellent expression of his sense of precariousness and insecurity. In many difficult times that is precisely how life feels—hung upon nothing, and in momentary danger of falling away into the abyss. So

here, a man who feels the instability and uncertainty of his hold upon the life of the spirit, may very naturally transfer these sentiments to the science which he is constructing.

And yet this earth, so precariously hung, is firm enough for man's uses. He can dwell upon it in safety, and walk to and fro upon his various business on its platform, and looking up from thence he can see the sun and moon and stars. This is indeed a sufficiently exact statement of our spiritual situation. In every way the life of man is still felt to be a thing of unstable equilibrium, insecure in the last degree, yet it may be lived steadily and with confidence. We swing forever over tremendous mysteries, and yet we can live our ordinary lives upon the platform on which we swing; and, looking up, we also may see the heavens and all their splendours. Thus the ancient cosmogony is a kind of metaphor for our spiritual life. It expresses the feel of life in a manner which most of us recognize and welcome. The literal truth of it is within the spirit of man, and every generation knows it. The resultant ancient view of the world and of the Great Deep is perhaps the finest figurative expression of a spiritual truth that ever has been or could be found.

As for the general truth which this concep-

tion illustrates, I should like to view it in three different applications in reference to our modern life and thought.

1. *Natural science.* One of the most interesting facts in the thought of the past half century has been the passing of that type of crude materialism which was associated with the name of Haeckel. The popularity of his volume entitled *The Riddle of the Universe,* and the influence which it exerted upon the mind of its time, is now a rather puzzling memory in the story of intellectual development. Apart altogether from Christianity, natural science swung back past Haeckel's position and incorporated more and more of spiritual data, either as ascertained fact or at least possibility. Sir Oliver Lodge in his earlier days insisted upon the scientific possibility of a communion with the spiritual world through prayer, and still earlier Professor George John Romanes, in his posthumous volume entitled *Thoughts and Religion,* told the story of his soul, and in intimate personal notes gave one of the most striking and significant of all testimonies to the reality and power of spiritual life. These great thinkers had an enormous influence upon the mind of their time, and along with other similar testimonies they brought it about that the or-

dinary man felt it no longer unscientific to be a believer in his own soul. Yet from every such period of thought as that of the earlier materialism there linger memories and prejudices. These remain in the minds of future generations in spite of the new invasion of spiritual hope and faith. They remain, not so much in the form of definitely stated and argued opinions, as of a pervading spirit of doubt and hesitation which tends to check men's advance in faith, and to dull the edge of their confidence. One such prejudice lingers even yet in regard to the grounds of our Christian faith as contrasted with those of science. It is supposed by many, who cannot or will not take the pains to examine the supposition, that while science builds its structure of opinion upon known and proved facts, no such claim can be made for religion.

It is this prejudice which gives permanent significance to Mr. Arthur J. Balfour's book, *The Foundations of Belief*. The first part of that fascinating volume is entirely occupied with carrying the war into the enemy's camp. It is one long *tu quoque*, in which the author asserts and seeks to prove that, in respect of ultimate foundations, natural science is in no better case than religion. Materialistic scien-

tists had supposed that their foundations were secure down to the very bottom of things, and that believers in spiritual realities had no such foundations whatever. Upon examination it appears that no claim could be less valid than this. People speak about matter itself as if they knew all about it, but when we try to define it our attempt is astonishingly instructive. As one goes back through the many successive theories which have arisen and passed within a lifetime, the claim of ultimate foundations very soon vanishes. The atoms have journeyed through a longer course than the Israelites, and have encountered more adventures than Ulysses, without reaching any promised land of definition. Even to-day they elude all search; and indeed Bishop Berkeley, who denied the reality of matter altogether, has never yet been finally and convincingly answered. Force is notoriously in no better case.

Even motion very soon lands us in amazing perplexities. One remembers the ancient puzzle of the Greek sophists, that a thing cannot move where it is, because then it would cease to be where it is, and on the other hand it cannot move where it is not, because it cannot be where it is not. Electricity is known simply so far as the utilizing of it for practical purposes; but no one knows what it is in itself;

and, for lack of understanding, the phrase "the electric fluid" has long been found useful to cover popular ignorance. Until recently, the law of gravitation was considered as a thing thoroughly understood, probed to the bottom, and established forever; but Einstein suddenly arose and relegated gravitation to the same category of insoluble mystery as the rest. We can utilize all these things but we cannot know them, and we seem to be no nearer the knowledge of their ultimate nature than our fathers were.

The problem of life is in no better case. Biology has given us wonderful accounts of the facts as they present themselves to the observer, and physiology has disclosed the marvels of mechanism which lie behind all these phenomena; but science, when a definition of the ultimate meaning of the fact of life is demanded of it, is no nearer a solution to-day than it was of old. Indeed Herbert Spencer's word remains still as good as any that has been spoken, defining life merely as the sum of the forces that can resist death. By all these ways we arrive at the same result, and men of letters and of science confirm it in memorable words. Lecky has gone near the heart of things when he tells us that "The discovery of law is not an adequate solution of the problem

of causes." Hugh Benson has translated the scientific confession into popular form when he says that "the real searchers after truth know that the further one goes in one's inquiries, it only means that one gets nearer the heart of some insoluble mystery; and that the highest possible outcome of human knowledge, in any line almost, consists in this—that one can state with something like correctness, not the key to the mystery, the answer to the riddle, but the riddle itself. Professor J. Arthur Thompson sums up the whole matter in one memorable sentence: "Each new discovery only shows us a wider circle of our surrounding ignorance."

Yet, in spite of all this question about foundations, science is perfectly secure, and its conclusions are trustworthy. Our knowledge cannot indeed begin at the bottom of anything: but, beginning where our experience of the thing begins, we can build up a satisfactory system of real knowledge which can be put to practical uses, not merely in the laboratory of the scientist but in the factory and in the home.

2. *Our knowledge of ourselves and of each other.* This, like the former, is an ancient puzzle, and it cannot be said that we are very much nearer a solution of it now than in former days. It is pathetic to read, across well-

nigh four centuries, the lines of Sir John Davies:

"Musicians think our souls are harmonies,
Physicians think that they complexions be,
Epicures make them swarms of atomies
Which do by chance into our bodies flee.

"Some think one gen'ral soul fills every brain
As the great sun sheds light in every star,
And others think the name of soul is vain
And that we only well-mixed bodies are.

"Thus these great clerks their little wisdom show
While with their doctrines they at hazard play,
Passing their light opinions to and fro
To mock the lewd—as learn'd in this as they."

In connection with the inquiry into the nature of man's spirit, all sorts of questions arise on every side, regarding the connection of mind with matter, the dependence of thought upon brain, and the identification or correlation of the two.[1] It may be said without much fear of contradiction that in this field also, though much has been written, nothing or next to nothing is known. Similarly the old controversy between free-will and necessity has had enough written upon it to upset the balance of

[1] Cf. James' *Human Immortality* with its illuminating words concerning the three-fold possibility of this connection—creative, releasing, or expressive.

the world, as it has upset the balance of a good many of its inhabitants. Yet each generation is puzzled again, and it is pathetic to see a new crop of fresh spirits advancing each year to the trodden battlefields and adopting the ancient cries. The very existence of any other person besides oneself comes into this category. If you meet with a lunatic who denies that other people exist, and considers that everybody else is but a shadow while he is the only reality, I shall defy you to prove him wrong by a logical argument which will be thoroughly satisfactory either to him or to yourself. You may indeed say to him that it is simply a matter of votes, that the vast majority of people think in this way and so one must believe it: but it will hardly be possible for you not to remember that the vast majority of people have on many occasions been wrong, while the one apparent lunatic has been proved right. Lunatics in general are desperately difficult people to argue with, not because they are unreasonable, but because they are so terribly reasonable along one line; and much intercourse with them leads to frequent humiliation.

Thus, so far as absolutely proved knowledge goes, we must all confess ourselves completely ignorant upon many matters which are commonly taken for granted, and on which we

act in the practical sphere every day. The only answer that we can give to any one who objects to this is just that by the very constitution of our human nature we must take the risk. We find ourselves here under the stern necessity of living, and in order to live we must rest and act upon certain fundamental convictions, without which human life would be impossible. Further, if we take this course, we soon find that life works back to knowledge. By taking certain fundamental things for granted, we attain to a practical knowledge of their reality, which cannot be always defended by abstract reasoning, but which is none the less true knowledge. Among other such convictions we attain to that of one another's existence, a conviction which satisfies all the real necessities of thought, although it may satisfy little or nothing of its curiosity.

3. *Faith* is equally, but not in any greater degree, founded upon insoluble mysteries.

"Oh, I would like to ken—to the beggar-wife says I
The reason o' the cause an' the wherefore o' the why,
Wi' mony anither riddle brings the tear into my e'e.
'It's gey an' easy spierin',' says the beggar-wife to me."

If some one challenges our belief in the existence of God, asserting that this is but the relic of a childish fancy, or that it had its origins in primitive fear, we may point out that we have dropped other childish beliefs, while we feel constrained to retain this one on other grounds. We may admit that primitive fears have intensified man's conviction of God, but may still maintain that they do not create it. In such ways we shall be led into long controversy which may occupy many volumes. But in all such controversies, through which men have sought to establish belief in God by argument, it is to be noted that the main stress is laid upon origins, and the center of debate always ranges around these. It is an endless warfare, and in the great majority of minds it leads to no particular result. But there comes a time when the believer discovers that he is not really interested in the origins of beliefs, but in the actual beliefs as he holds them—facts of his own religious experience. Just as in former cases, so here. You may utilize these facts although you cannot understand them; and in the end you will discover that if any progress is to be made, the only course is to leave the questions of origins alone in the meantime, since we cannot now go back to them with any certainty or clearness of vision.

The facts must be attacked at the present cross-section of our actual human experience. We have to work out all such questions in terms of religious values, and ask, What part does God play in my life as I know it now? Can I or can I not meet Him within the workings of my soul and discover Him in the revelations and interpretations of life which my own soul provides?

The same thing holds true in regard to immortality and the life beyond death. After many centuries of argument it must be frankly confessed that nothing has emerged from abstract argument which is absolutely convincing to the intellect. The stock argument from the analogy of nature, the hints supposed to be given in consciousness concerning a previous existence, the classical arguments from the nature of the soul, are confessedly insecure and disappointing. From the poetic point of view they are interesting and beautiful, but to many minds they lack compelling power. It is a very striking fact that when Robert Browning sought to argue out this question he was able only to reach the dim probabilities of *La Saisiaz:*

"So I hope—no more than hope, but hope—no less than hope."

But, both in earlier and in later times, he reached the certainty of *Prospice* and of the *Epilogue to Asolando* by employing other methods. Our own experience of love, revealing God within the soul, may give to us the Psalmist's ancient conviction that a soul once loved cannot be lost, and that He who has revealed Himself to us as Lover of the soul will certainly not leave it to death.[1] The upshot of the whole matter is this, that so long as you face such problems on the ground of mere intellectual debate, it will be found that there is always some possible way of arguing against evidence. You will never reach by logic that firmness and permanence of conviction which may be derived from the simple act by which the soul faces, interprets, and trusts its own experience.

The acutest point for the preacher is his presentation of the central fact of Christian faith, the cross of Christ. Much has been written about the atonement and many theories propounded, but it must be confessed that the results have been rather disappointing. After all is said about that stupendous dogma, no man who has thought deeply upon it can profess to understand it. It rests upon profound mysteries which at the present time are wholly

[1] Psalm 16: 10.

insoluble. Behind it there is the long line of the thoughts of ancient men, generations and centuries of barbaric sacrifice and the guilt and fear which inspire it; profound convictions as to the justice of God and the love of God in their relations to one another; unfathomable mysteries of free-will and responsibility; tragic facts of human sin and the curse which follows upon it. Altogether this doctrine is founded upon the floods, the tossing sea of the life of human conscience and the deeper and more tremendous depths of the divine nature and purpose. And yet, although it rests upon such profound and unfathomable mysteries, it is nevertheless founded, and it forms a firm and stable platform for man's experience of redemption. It is secure enough for all that any man's soul will ever need. You do not require to begin at the foundations of the universe, nor at the dawn of history, nor at any metaphysical theory underlying the doctrine of atonement. You may begin here, at the one simple question as to what religious value the cross has for man, and what it can do for his soul. Doubtless it is founded upon terrifying floods of moral horror which register their fullest tide at Calvary, and upon depths of the mystery of divine operation which no man has ever yet comprehended. But for us it means

simply the love of God manifest in Jesus Christ, satisfying all the unknown requirements of our tragic and distracted case. In our acceptance of it we find the love of God flooding our soul, beating back the chase of enemies, making us over again in a new manhood, giving to the outraged conscience a permanent peace, and to the sick and haunted soul the calm joy of the redeemed.

Thus it appears that religious faith, like the other beliefs which we have mentioned, seems to rest upon nothing. There are times when the anxious believer discovers that his faith's foundations have apparently vanished and are out of sight. At such times it is not surprising that he should be tempted to ask, What if it be not true after all? Nor will it be surprising if, in his attempt to answer that question, he should discover that he has no argument by which he may effectually silence doubt. At such a time there is but one thing for him to do. He must fall back upon his own experience and find in that a sufficient ground for believing. Whatever floods of mystery the doctrines of Christianity are ultimately founded on, here in actual present experience there is solid ground beneath them, a sufficient platform for faith to stand upon. Religion does not mean that we profess to

know what God is and that we are able to define Him. It means that we know God as an actual potent factor in our own lives. The late Dr. Dale has said that it is easy to believe in God so long as one is not asked to define Him, and there is a far-reaching truth in the words. In our faith we have to begin somewhere, and we simply cannot get to the ultimate roots of things to begin there.

But the real seat of authority is not in the ultimate roots of things but in a man's own heart and life, and he who seeks it outside of these will seek in vain. This experience-knowledge will satisfy your own mind and soul. You know it, although you do not know how you know it. You will observe that others find it in the main to be the same as that which you find, so that it will verify itself not only in individual dogmatic certainty, but in a common Christian faith. But the main point for each man is not what others believe but what he himself believes, and the main ground of his certainty must ultimately rest in the processes of his own mind.[1]

[1] It may seem to some that this is unreasonable. But there is a clear distinction to be drawn between reason and reasoning. We frankly admit that such certainties cannot be arrived at by reasoning. Yet in the larger sense they may be given in reason. Logic is not the

Thus, from the purely theoretical point of view, faith is, and always must be, a venture. Of every earnest thinker the question is asked, How much intellectual completeness are you prepared to risk, or even to sacrifice, on the chance of your faith proving to be true? The answer is that the venture justifies itself by fitting you into an intelligible universe. This answer is made, primarily, on the ground that your own individual experience will back and confirm your faith. It is further supported by the fact that many thousands of the noblest and most trustworthy voices tell you that their faith also has been thus confirmed. Yet in this matter the all-important question concerns our own experience. Christianity always goes on the principle that they who trust shall come to know. It would seem that life likes to be trusted, and that it rewards the trustful. Our argument is that it will in a practical manner convince each one who ventures it, although none of us may know theoretically how that conviction is achieved.

Of course there always will be some who

only method of reason. It includes much that cannot be reduced to logical formulæ, and, as Benjamin Kidd has excellently expressed it, such "ultra-rational sanctions" are equally valid with results of formal reasoning.

demand a complete proof, and who insist upon solving the whole problem of the universe before they will consent to believe. They will have all or nothing, and no faith will satisfy them which cannot trace its pedigree back to the furthest metaphysical ancestry. Our reply to such must be that we are only asking them to do in their religion the thing which they are actually doing—which indeed they cannot help doing—in everything else. Your whole world of conviction, both as regards science, and even as regards personal existence itself, is founded upon the floods. Its ultimate definitions are lost in metaphysical mystery. If that be so, it is wholly unfair to deny to us the right to do in our Christian faith the very identical thing which you are doing in every other region of belief. If it be a matter of absolute proof, you have no right to believe in your own personal existence, or in the data of elementary natural science. We claim to hold our faith on precisely the same terms.

Dr. Dale in one of his books gives an interesting incident in connection with a certain chapel which had a peculiarly noble set of pillars on which the heavy weight above the pulpit seemed to rest. During structural alterations these pillars and the panelled spaces between them had to be cut across. Then, to

their astonishment, the people found that the pillars were actually hanging from the very structures which they were supposed to uphold. So, in the last analysis, it is with faith. All human faith ultimately rests on experience, either direct or transmitted, and the real strength of the faith is measured by the directness and immediacy of its connection with the believer's own experience. Instead of our experience-faith depending on its metaphysical explanations, the fact is that these explanations depend entirely upon it.

All this is by no means so strange as it seems. In these days, when M. Bergson is telling us in such brilliant fashion that knowledge is for life and not life for knowledge, we can well believe that there must be within our own lives some vital facts which are creditable in their own right. All that concerns us most, either for time or for eternity, is founded intellectually upon floods of insoluble mystery. However much we would like to do so, there is no part of it which we can search to its foundations and prove to the satisfaction of abstract reasoning. Our wisdom, therefore, and our only hope, is continually to turn back from gray theory to the brilliance of actual life, to cease from shouting our vain questions down into the bottomless abyss, to lay hold

upon life itself and to demand that it shall tell us its own meaning.

We must still face the last stand of doubt. Suppose that a man has accepted the general point of view which this lecture has sought to express, there remains one final difficulty. That is the doubt concerning experience itself, which would rob us of everything if it were to triumph. This doubt is sometimes due to a blind habit of questioning everything, which leads the mind into a condition of hopeless irresolution and hesitancy. There is a story of a dull pupil who was the despair of his tutor in elementary mathematics. When at last, after much tribulation, the tutor congratulated himself upon having made him understand the meaning of simple equations, his hopes were dashed by a perplexed expression upon the young man's face and the question, But what if x should turn out not to be the unknown quantity after all? But, apart from such a disease of scepticism as that, there are times when we seem to have reason to doubt the validity of our own experience. At such times we are not sure of ourselves, nor of the true meaning and value of the world of thoughts and feelings within us. Indeed we perceive that many of the experiences upon which our every-day life and thought actually

rest are themselves confused and unintelligible. Blunders, shames and sorrows, surprising successes and glories, form the stuff of that moral and emotional tragedy which is ourselves, as memory and introspection reveal us. It baffles any man to understand his own soul, and in what has been called "the endless vagueness of modern life" we are far more confused than were our fathers. Beneath our actual character we know that there is heredity at work. Beneath all our beliefs there are hidden predispositions. We are subject to changes of mood, to passionate storms, to contradictory impulses, and to a seething swirl of questions of all sorts. It is no wonder if we are tempted at times to demand some solution, final and absolute, which shall reveal us authoritatively to ourselves. In older days this trouble took the form of spiritual despondency. Men asked whether they were saved, whether they were elected, whether there was any hope for them beyond the fleeting hopes of earth. They distrusted their religious experience, questioned whether it were authentic, and fell upon bitterness because of a sense of chronic failure which would yield neither to the most strenuous effort nor to the most exalted visions of faith.

The modern form is different. It consists

of a distrust of character and a rooted tendency to question and reëxamine one's principles. These seem not to be fixed and stable rocks, but rather things floating upon the surface of the flood, whose location is determined by the will of the tides of life. What is the meaning of all this? we ask, and where can we find any permanently satisfactory and stable ground for belief? We have already transferred the basis of faith from accepted dogma to actual known experience, but if our experience itself be subject to so much change, what are we to do for faith? The answer is that if God be founding our lives upon the floods, our experience of God's grace must be founded there also. The consensus of opinion of Christian men, or at least of the vast majority of them, is that the faith by which they have lived and died was not given them in halcyon days of calm. Generally it came in certainties that were flashed upon them in the midst of stormy waters. The condition of mind in which we receive our faith is not usually that of stable equilibrium and cool and reasoned thinking, but in turbulent experience. It is there that we find the characteristic foundations for personal faith and assurance. Man's sins and follies and desperations are a true and normal platform for his faith. It

was not the Psalmist alone, but many centuries of earnest men following him, who might have written the undying words: *He drew me out of great waters.*

Doubtless each one of us, whether his faith be of the older or of the more modern type, will discover many questions about himself and his spiritual condition which he cannot answer. His faith will find no satisfactory basis even in his own past experience. Looking back through the years it will be easy for him to question the validity of high spiritual moments which at the time appeared to bring to him the very voice of God. A disquieting suspicion will come upon him that his state of grace cannot be proved nor assured, either from the character he is achieving or from his memory of conversion in the past. All that is not surprising. These are but the floods on which faith and religious life are founded, and the point of wisdom is to take it so, and to attend, not to such foundations, but to the one little platform of immediate present experience which floats upon their surface. Begin where you are, though it be between sky and water. Do not trouble about the reality or the validity of any past experience, whether it be conversion or any other whatsoever. Here and now, stable or floating upon the floods, choose God

for your God and trust His good faith for the treatment of your soul. Choose Christ for your Christ, to interpret the meaning of life and the redeeming love of God to you. Then shall you know most certainly that there is a Father in heaven, and that Christ saves men.

LECTURE II

THE BASIS OF AUTHORITY

LECTURE II

THE BASIS OF AUTHORITY

ACTS 17: 22–32.

THE argument of the opening lecture was that, in regard to its ultimate foundations, religious faith is in precisely the same position as physical science is. In neither case is it possible to build up a system from the bottom rocks: in each case we are forced to cut in at the cross-section of our experience, and to begin our construction from that platform. If this argument can be made good, it will form a complete answer to naturalism in its attack upon Christianity. Yet every thoughtful mind must perceive that the argument has raised further questions which have not yet been answered. Historical Christianity has not been built only from metaphysical foundations. It has risen largely from authority also. While some believers in every generation have sought to find satisfactory proof of it to the last analysis, all believers have had to reckon with the testimony

of the Church and the revelation of the Bible. These are apparently new factors, which make a difference between our acceptance of Christian truth and our acceptance of the results of physical science. Each of them has professed to provide for the believer an ultimate authority, the Church with its traditional sanctions, and the Bible with its infallible inspiration. It is our duty now to inquire into these and to ask in what sense we are to regard them as ultimate sources of authority.

The argument of the present lecture is that we freely and with all reverence admit that the tradition of the Christian Church is a most valuable and real element in the discussion of any article of faith. We admit also that the Bible is, in a quite unique sense, the record of God's revelation of truth to man. But on the other hand we still maintain that no external authority, however venerable and however sacred, can of itself, and so long as it remains external, dominate man's belief. We shall try to show that all such external authorities must become internal by their appeal to living experience, and that only when they have proved themselves authoritative to the individual soul can they be rightly accepted as commanding. Otherwise we would have merely escaped from metaphysical externality to fall back upon

traditional externality, and would be in no better case than we were before.

I have associated with the present lecture one of the most picturesque and remarkable incidents recorded in the whole history of religion. Paul at Athens discussing religious problems upon Mars' Hill is certainly a very striking figure, and his words on that occasion touch most intimately the history of Greek thought. The unknown God, the temples made with hands, the quotation from Aratus, the broad conception of the Father that giveth to all life and breath, and in Whom all live and move and have their being, the declaration of a God Who is not far from any one of us—all this comes home with peculiar relevancy to our present subject. The Athens through which Paul had passed to Mars' Hill was full of the ruins of a former day whose exquisite worship of the Olympians had left the carved work of their temples already deep in acanthus and whose former strength and severe morality contrasted strangely with the garlanded songs of decadent revellers and the clash of wine cups amid the ruins of ancient greatness. It may not be at first apparent, but the fact is that Paul stands there as a second Socrates, and takes up the ancient message with wonderful new applications. The curious and

artistic Greeks had always tended to seek for God, and for all that was highest in human life, in external things. They found their religion through nature and the outward life of man, through visible beauty and harmony. These are good, but God is apt to get lost among them, and Paul is here doing in his own way precisely what Socrates had done in the same city long ago: he is leading them back from the search for God among external things to the inner life of the spirit. In many details the parallel is curious and interesting down to that touch of immortality which offended the older audience and amused the later. Two men, uncouth of body but wonderfully great in spirit, sought to lead two generations back from external things and accepted theories to the living inspiration of their own personal experience. Faith had gone wandering among ideas and tales which were detached from and external to the life of man. One by one this externality had flung off the details of earlier faith, as things disregarded by the educated and left only to the ignorant and superstitious. Meanwhile God also had been lost, and there were very few thinkers in Athens, if indeed there were any, who believed in Him in any personal and intimate way. It is certainly a curious spectacle, this of Saint Paul as a

second Socrates, recalling disbelieving men to the quiet center within their own souls in order to find their lost God, telling them that that quiet center is the only place which God never leaves, and virtually repeating the Socratic admonition, enforced now by the memory of Jesus Christ, *Know thyself.*

There is much in this incident that brings us forward into our own times. Held apart by many centuries, utterly different in regard to the actual content of man's thoughts about nature and the supernatural, Paul's day and ours have this in common, that in both of them men have been externalizing their search for God, and in doing so have lost their faith in Him. For many among us the old divinities are dead, and the days of simplicity in faith are behind us. Whole cities of men and women are living now among the wreckage of their broken gods, and the pathos of modern life arises largely from that fact. "Of infinite sadness are the dying agonies of the gods," and many of us have felt upon our spirits the shadow of that great sorrow. In consequence of this condition we find endless contradictions in the attitude of men towards belief. Many who hold an apparent faith in public confess in private to an actual disbelief. There are some who are equally annoyed by the ar-

dent faith of one and the hearty denial of another. All acknowledge that the external story of our religion is interesting and indeed fascinating for all students who will examine it; but the recurring question, Is it true? takes away the glamour from their appreciation.

There are many among us who dare not break their connection with old faith, but who in their secret hearts wish that they had better grounds for affirming it. They are seeking substitutes for that faith in all directions, and this explains the many varieties of religions which present themselves for popularity to-day. Some of these are mere *réchauffés* of ancient speculations which pass themselves off upon the ignorant as novel systems of belief. Others, under the high-sounding names of æstheticism or mysticism, really concern themselves with such matters as the patterns of wall papers and ingenious mechanisms for entrapping the spirits of the dead. Many, whose minds are better balanced, still fall back upon Mr. Huxley's clever and honest word, and call themselves agnostics.

The meaning of all this is really a cry for ultimate authority. 'Tell us plainly,' they demand of Christian faith, 'Art thou it that should come or do we look for another? We are tired of compromises between faith and

unbelief. If the metaphysical basis of faith be gone, give us some other basis on which we may rest it. We desire a city that hath foundations so sure and certain that we cannot dispute nor doubt any more. Let Christianity show itself inevitable and we will accept it. We are tired of intellectual liberty and unchartered freedom of thought, and all we cry for now is the assurance that faith is such that we cannot possibly escape it. Like Circe in Augusta Webster's great poem, we "crave that one shall come" to be our master utterly—yes, even our tyrant, if that be necessary. Let Him recall us to some true fold where our spirits can find rest.' So we have our *Apologias* and our *Grammars of Assent.* We confess that in themselves they are not intellectually justifiable, but then they are so sorely needed, so eagerly desired!

There are many causes which at the present time are leading men away from the inner to an outer authority for their faith. There are some who, like Troop in Mr. Wells' *Joan and Peter,* are "for a simple and unquestioning loyalty to any one who comes along and professes to be an authority. When he mentioned the king his voice dropped worshipfully." This phase can hardly be said to be dangerously common in America, yet it exists even here,

and there are other lands in which it is common enough. Again there is the weariness which follows upon the extreme high pressure of modern life, and which makes any offered resting-place very tempting. Countless men and women whose ordinary life is full of questions which they are perpetually straining themselves to solve, demand of their religion a place where all that striving shall cease, and they shall be able to reach the lotos-eaters' afternoon after the burden and heat of their busy and secular morning.

Finally, there is a growing self-distrust, and a sense of perplexity regarding inner phenomena, which is perhaps the result of the sudden expansion of the field of human knowledge. Men acquire a habit of taking their views of ordinary matters on trust, simply because there is no other course left in an age of experts in particular sciences. For most students this does well enough, where there is no great complexity in the search nor importance in the answer found. It certainly saves trouble, but it leads us to live in a world like that of the short-sighted. In that world there are few things which are exactly seen or accurately known. Yet we see with sufficient clearness to get to our appointed goal in most cases, and we acquire the habit of refus-

ing to make long journeys for whose guidance this trustful method would not suffice.

The two great offers that are made to this age are those of the Church and the Bible.

1. The Church. In the case of the Roman Catholic Church we protest against the absolute claim of authority. Yet at certain times the Protestant Church has made the same claim in its treatment of questions of orthodoxy and heresy. The conception in both cases is that of an official and authentic repository of truth which embodies and circumscribes the world's religious knowledge. The Church claims that it is given to her to be the storehouse, and the only storehouse, of religious truth. She offers to take over from the individual all responsibility for his thinking, and to settle all questions for him with the simple statement that the Church has fixed this dogma, and all that concerns him is that he shall accept it.

It must be confessed that this claim is, for many minds, extremely attractive and alluring. It explains the inevitable drift towards Rome in doubting times. Some, like John Henry Newman, seem to be so constituted that this is the natural way for them. Their conscience of truth is not so strong as their cry for certainty and rest, and they justify their

acceptance on the ground that this way has brought them peace through believing. The Protestant answer to this has too often been an abrupt accusation of dishonesty; and it is peculiarly interesting to read, in the light of that accusation, Professor William James' plea, in his *Will To Believe,* for the legitimacy of acceptance in cases where such acceptance seems to be demanded for practical efficiency in life.

In considering this point of view it ought to be admitted frankly at the outset that there is no doubt a very real authority in the Church. The mass of Christendom, the accumulated wisdom and experience of the ages, is surely likely to be wiser and richer in gifts of the Spirit than any individual mind can be. When we consider the quality, both intellectually and morally, of many of the Church's guides, we are constrained to confess that it would be only the most presumptuous individualism which would discount the testimony of so many great intellects, so many pure and lofty spirits, and so many centuries of faith. Surely all those high and choice souls have not lived and thought in vain; and there is a kind of arrogance, which is the fruit of littleness rather than of greatness, in those who underrate the past. They remind us of that kind of

student who constructs for himself a new school of philosophy all his own, and is so much taken up with belonging to it that he can find no time for reading any other system of philosophy. In the course of a lifetime diligently spent among the intellectual movements of modern days, one becomes distrustful of amateur religions.

Yet while freely admitting all that, there is great need for clearness in our thinking here. Questions inevitably arise which must sift and judge our right to believe, even upon the authority of the choicest spirits. First of all there is the question of loyalty. There are those, like Wells' Troop, who are inclined to overwork that excellent word. Loyalty as a plea for submission to authority needs to be very closely examined before it is accepted. There is a difference, for instance, between the loyalties of patriotism and those of belief. Some are inclined to say that, just as in matters of patriotism the fact that this is *my land* settles all questions, so in matters of religion all questions ought to bow before *my church.* There is, however, a difference between the cases. Questions of faith on intellectual matters have to be tested by individual standards, and no loyalty can ever supersede the ultimate loyalty of the intellect to truth. There are

things which we have no right to surrender, out of any loyalty whatsoever. In friendship and in love it is not loyalty either to ask or to give these things.

> "I could not love thee, Dear, so much
> Loved I not honour more."

Of such transcendent quality ought to be our loyalty to truth, and the church which seeks to usurp that is in the deepest sense a traitor.

Again, in regard to patriotism, and still more in regard to church authority, the question is far more complicated than it seems to be. *My land* may involve many reasons for preferring one's own land to any other. Yet that cannot mean that one is persuaded that one's own country always thinks and acts rightly. That would be simply the blind loyalty of "My country right or wrong," which is picturesquely admirable as a sentiment, but is wholly immoral as a principle. For indeed the truest loyalty is very far from being blind to the faults of its object. It is acutely aware of them, and if it be wise it will always claim the right of criticism as well as of appreciation. Thus, when we say *my church,* and say it with the utmost pride and affection, we do not mean that it is therefore infallible, but only that it is the best beloved.

Further, when we say that we accept the authority of the Church, the question immediately arises, To which church do we refer? Had the Church remained one and undivided, there would have been a greater show of evidence for her claim to absolute authority. But, fortunately or unfortunately, Christendom has been split up into something like seven hundred organized and recognized communions, and the outsider coming for authority to the Church finds himself plunged into a chaos of side issues and peculiar circumstances out of which every separate creed and formula arose. He finds himself confronted with the duty of deciding the claims of some at least of these various communions; and any such decision must, of course, involve historical and other study. But it is apparent that by that fact alone the seat of authority is changed. In that very study which is imposed upon him, the man is obviously judging the Church. He must do so if he is to decide between this or that rival claim for ultimate authority. Thus, then, in the very act of deciding which church he shall obey, the man is appealing to a higher authority than that of any church. He is, in fact, judging the Church, instead of the Church judging him.

This consideration alone must end all hope

of final authority in the testimony of the Church. Its faith is not authoritative in the absolute sense, if we have to find reasons for holding that faith. There is in fact a vicious circle here. Before the Church can be accepted as the highest authority, it must itself pass the tribunal of a still higher, and so we are thrown back again from the external to the internal region. The tribunal which determines the authority of the Church is in some form or other the inner light, the reason of man laid open directly to the influences of the Spirit of God.

Of course this whole matter is dealt with by the Church of Rome in its own fashion. She perceives and pities the confusion of voices and the variety of religious experience. She has appointed herself the one authentic channel of the Spirit. Her one great fundamental principle is *semper, ubique, et ab omnibus.* This principle has been held through all her generations, and it forms the basis for her doctrines of tradition, of apostolic succession, and finally for that of papal infallibility. Protestantism challenges this claim at every point. Of the ancient formula *semper, ubique, et ab omnibus,* she asserts that this is simply not so. There is no set of doctrines which has been always held. There is none which

has ever been held everywhere nor by all. To use that formula is possible only by one very simple process. Eliminate everything except yourself, and then say that you are the only one. Assert, with whatsoever pomp and circumstance, that "what I don't know isn't knowledge," and you may arrive at a very satisfactory intellectual complacency. Our reply is that to meet an enemy by asserting that he does not exist, is no doubt conclusive to one in a certain mental condition, but all its comfort depends upon that mental condition.

But we need linger no longer over this aspect of the question. The battle of Protestantism was primarily a purely rational affair. Apart from its deeper religious content, the Protestant Church has always contended for ordinary freedom of thought and conscience. The very essence of Protestantism is the dealing of the individual for himself with God, and he who has once felt the power of that claim, simply cannot hand over his responsibility for truth to any church. Every Protestant considers himself subject to the Holy Spirit's guidance, direct and independent. Of course, if he be wise, he will provide the Holy Spirit with material for that guidance, by studying the record of the faith of other men and the Church's judgment upon it. But this

record will only be authoritative to him in so far as it finds responsive answer in his own spirit.

Apart from the question of the particular church which has the right to claim ultimate authority, another matter remains. The Church, whatever group of opinion that may mean, is a phrase which looks much bigger than it is. It is indeed very impressive to be told that we are to bow before the doctrines held *ab omnibus,* but it is impossible not to ask, Who are the *omnes?* The real authority of the Church at any particular point of time can only mean the opinion of a very small minority at that time. The matters in dispute involve profound research and thorough scholarship, and the ultimate authority must therefore be those proven authorities, scholars and searchers, who are entrusted with the task. But within the Church these are an extremely small minority, and beyond them is the vast multitude which accepts their results without personal examination, and yet swells the apparent authority of the decision. Very few of these are either equipped for the task of deciding, or indeed capable of it. Fewer still are either willing or daring enough to face it. Thus the authority of the Church at any particular time means, in the first place, the

thought-out judgment of a very few, and, in the second place, the prejudices and the compliance of the vast majority. These prejudices and that compliance are by no means very respectable guides to faith. Doubtless they are inevitable for the busy average man, and he may justify himself for trusting wiser minds and specialized labours. Yet undoubtedly this formidable array, which must necessarily produce a strong impression upon the unthinking, includes also the intellectual laziness of some, and the cowardice of even more.

It is replied that besides all this—the scholarship and the prejudice which combine together to make up the idea of the Church's authority—there is a continuous stream of living religious experience in the Church. The history alike of ancient heresies and modern theologies shows the Church rejecting from the main stream, certain ways of thinking about God and man which prove themselves to be spiritually ineffective. We must answer that that has been by no means the only criterion by which heresy has been distinguished from orthodoxy, and that there is an enormous number and variety of spiritual manifestations which have proved more or less effective in the past. Great differences have appeared be-

tween these effective manifestations, even upon matters of faith which have usually been considered essential, or at least important. It would therefore appear that, so far as the dogmatic statement of Christian doctrine is concerned, very little can be left upon which the tradition of the Church is really authoritative in any compelling sense.

Having found it impossible to rest upon the Church as the final basis of authority the Protestant believer has been supposed to fall back upon the Bible, substituting an infallible book for an infallible church. There are two ways, however, in which the Bible may be regarded as the ultimate authority in matters of faith. It is possible so to regard it as to make it as external and mechanical an authority as we found the Church to be. "For me my Bible was the most absolute of realities, and to it I strove my hardest to adapt the universe." These words, written by a French Roman Catholic, are only too true of the pathetic and impossible situation in which many a Protestant also has found himself. This, however, was not the view of the great master minds of the Reformation. Luther fought most valiantly for the freedom of the spirit, and Calvin in his *Institutes* shows how far he was from being

an advocate of any mechanical rule of faith.[1] It is true that, when the free intelligence and bold wisdom of the first reformers gave place to the second rate mentality and cautious traditionalism of later men, there were those whose attitude to the Bible was entirely mechanical. Of such Protestants it would not be unfair to say that they replaced the external and mechanical authority of the Church by an equally external and mechanical authority of the Bible. They found in it the same satisfaction of absolute and unthinking obedience to authority which the Roman Catholic had found in church tradition. For them the Bible was a set of detached oracles, to be used as proof-texts for doctrines which were formulated long after the canon was closed, and as clubs upon the head of all free inquiry. Obviously such a view of the authority of the Bible is as external and as precarious as that view of the Church which it discredited and superseded. It left no room whatever for the inner light of the Holy Spirit, and it made men prisoners of the mind. Against all such views the protest of Saint Paul is final, *The word of God is not bound.*

Yet there always have been others to whom the Bible is authoritative, not upon any such

[1] Institutes, Bk. I, Chap. VII.

grounds of tradition, but because of the force of its appeal to their own consciences and spiritual needs. For them it represents a great literature, extending over long stages of time and running through many stages of a nation's life. It necessarily contains many different phases of faith and standards of morality, for it is the record of a revelation made by God to the highest spirits of successive generations. Its authority therefore will lie in its power to interpret the dealing of God with man according as man is able to receive such interpretation. In it we shall see the wonderful patience of our God, leading men out slowly through darkness to light; not only dropping by the way sufficient truth for contemporary men to live by, but leading on to Him Who is the perfect and final truth, the Word made flesh. In other words, the Bible can never be regarded as a dead and finished statement of doctrinal truths, but as a living Word of God to men, quick and powerful in its appeal, and certain of its response. It is a record of the way in which successive generations were led by God's grace to apprehend divine things, and as a stimulus to later generations similarly and still more fully to apprehend them.

Now what does all this mean? It must

mean that there is an authority within the soul which is apart from either the decree of the Church or the letter of Scripture. This inward authority convinces and legitimately commands the spirit of man. It recognizes and appropriates those permanent and divinely inspired truths which are presented to it by the Bible. We believe the Bible to be divinely inspired, but we are apt to ignore the question how we came by that belief. It must have been reached either on the Church's testimony external to us, or upon the Holy Spirit's testimony within. The *Confession of Faith* is quite explicit in this matter. Its language is, "The supreme judge, by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures." [1]

Obviously then the ultimate seat of authority cannot be an external but an inner one. Now at last we find ourselves within the soul. No external authority can possibly be final, for every such authority must pass the tribunal of the internal one and must prove itself by its appeal to the soul itself. "Who then is our

[1] Chapter 1 : 10.

authority? I reply, It is God Himself. I am accused of believing simply because men have spoken: and I reply that I believe as a matter of fact because God has spoken, and spoken not only in the remote past to others, but in the present, and to me."[1] This is the only ultimate authority, the only one that needs no further proof. Indeed there is no ultimate external authority. The very words present a contradiction in terms. All professed authority must ultimately be proved by its conformity with the facts of inner experience. Thus we must test both the Church's creed and the Bible's claim by this final test, their appeal to the soul's needs and instincts. There alone shall we find the bed-rock of faith. The claim of either Church or Bible regarded as external authorities is mere assertion. Such a claim must indeed remain so, because any proof that is offered in favour of it can only be made valid by going before some other tribunal and appealing to some prior authority, and that ultimate authority can only be within. In other words, no authority can be authoritative to us until we are constrained to assent to it. But the criterion that will regulate our consent can never simply be the fact that some person or some body of persons tells us so. It

[1] A. H. Gray.

must have our reason upon its side, and our spiritual nature must judge and approve of it within our souls. Apart from our inner experience and the testimony of the Holy Spirit, there is no conceivable authority which is valid in matters of religious faith. God has never delegated His authority to any person or to anything which might come between Himself and the spirit of man. He still maintains His great prerogative of speaking directly to the souls of His children.

There are, of course, those who in the name of religion have habituated themselves to disparage human nature to such an extent as to lead them to distrust any inner criterion whatsoever. For them the fallen and sinful soul of man is nothing better than a mass of perdition, entirely untrustworthy in spiritual judgment. We can only reply that, lamentable as is the condition of man's soul through sin, yet its capacity for God and for recognizing the voice of God is integral to its very nature, and can never wholly perish while the soul itself survives. In this as in other matters our judgment must depend largely upon the eye that looks. There are some who see in the deep earth only decay and darkness, the bones of the dead and the fossils of the still more ancient dead; while others see the roots of great

trees and the germinating life of all the world. Thus the earth is either the tomb or the cradle of the world. So the soul is either the place of hopeless catastrophe, in which all the powers of life are lost, or it is the place where hidden germs of faith and hope are buried for the time, and which is ready for the fructifying influences of the Spirit of God when the springtime of opportunity shall come. At its worst the soul of man is still capable of recognizing the truth of moral and spiritual facts when the Spirit of the Lord moves upon it. Its power of responding to these is bound up in the bundle of our innermost life. They inspire and they judge us. They liberate and they condemn.

It may be urged that all this is nothing less than mysticism; and indeed, if the word be properly understood, no Christian need blush to be associated with so noble a company as the mystics. They have exceeded the bounds within which commonplace spirits think and live, and have sometimes run wild, blinded and dazzled by their inner light. Let us consider one or two quotations from various representative writers of that school.

"Turn to thy heart, and thy heart will find its Saviour, its God, within itself. Thou seest, hearest, and feelest nothing of God because

thou seekest for Him abroad with thine outward eye: thou seekest for Him in books, in controversies, in the Church and outward exercises; but there thou wilt not find Him, till thou hast found Him in thy heart. Seek for Him in thy heart and thou wilt never seek in vain; for there He dwelleth: there is the seat of His light and Holy Spirit." [1]

"You may do what you like, mankind will believe no one but God, and he only can persuade mankind who believes that God has spoken to him." [2]

"The brightest light is within ourselves—every soul has a Bible—our chief duty in this world is to keep the windows of the soul wide open. We are now face to face with a simple and superb fact: the holiest place for every man is within his own soul. It is more awful than the holy of holies in any temple." [3]

"We must silence every creature, we must silence ourselves also, to hear in a profound stillness of the soul this inexpressible voice of Christ." [4]

These are some specimens of very typical mystic teaching. In a sense every Christian will not only understand but assent to them.

[1] William Law, *The Spirit of Discipline.*
[2] Joubert.
[3] Bradford, *The Inward Light.*
[4] Fenelon.

We are all mystics when we believe the Christian faith, in so far as we are all under the influence and within the sound of the inner voice of the Spirit. It is true that some mystics have ignored other helps to faith. They have run away from all connection with the Church and its testimonies, and have even treated the Bible as an unnecessary and imperfect guide to truth. This is their weakness, their temptation and extravagance. When they ignore and separate themselves from these great external sources of authority, they cut off the supplies of material upon which the Spirit within them may cast His light. In the absence of these they must have recourse to their own imagination for such supplies, and no man can forecast the wildness or the length to which such procedure may lead them. But there is no reason for this, and there are many mystics, both ancient and modern, who have reverently preserved both the best traditions of the Church and the truths revealed in the Bible, and have kept themselves from extravagance.

What then is to be our attitude to those external sources of authority of which we have been thinking? Shall we fling them aside and trust to nothing but the inner light playing upon such material as our imagination may be

able to supply? Most certainly not. We bring to the criterion of the soul's experience all that the Church and the Bible have to give us, and our authority for our belief will appear in the soul's reaction to these materials and the truths it recognizes in them. Towards the Church's tradition every wise man will be reverent. "One should be fearful of being wrong in poetry when one thinks differently from the poets, and in religion when one thinks differently from the saints."[1] There will be in Church tradition many consecrated errors which must be flung aside, for time is inexorable and ultimately demands the expulsion of all that is not truth. Yet the great mysteries of our faith, passing through the experience of the ages, will gain much confirmation from the fact that they have proved sufficient for so many. The very fact of such long acceptance is in itself an argument for adopting them, unless strong reason can be found for their repudiation. The general and catholic views of truth must surely have some valid foundation if they have commended themselves so as to gain the assent of the past, and to stand the test of spiritual application in many ages.

Yet the Bible makes a far stronger appeal

[1] Joubert.

than the testimony of the Church can ever do. It brings us nearer to those who first received it from the Spirit of God, than the Church tradition which has passed through the medium of many human hands before it reaches us. This claim for the authority of the Bible has no relation to detailed questions of historicity and evidence, which must be judged upon their merits like all other such matters. It remains sound, however, in regard to all that is essentially religious in the records of the Bible. It is not because we find love and hope, salvation and righteousness, in the Bible, that we believe in them as applicable to ourselves. It is because our own hearts are crying out for them, because either they or the need of them is in us, that we understand them and recognize their meaning when we find it in the Bible record. So recognized, we understand these same things in a new way when we find them in our own heart's cry. The Christ of the Bible answers and interprets all our deepest needs, so that these interpretations become part and parcel of our very life. That is Christian faith. It must be added as a peculiarly relevant and interesting fact that all these sources of supply for religious experience were themselves historically matters of religious experience before they became part

either of the Church's testimony or of the Bible's record. The method by which the Scripture was inspired was the Spirit of God moving upon the minds of men, and it is only in so far as the Spirit of God takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us that we find within ourselves the conviction of the truth which was given to other spirits of old. Church tradition and creed are, in a remoter and more indirect way, also built out of experience. The ground of all historic Christian faith lies in the story of Christ as it was accepted by the early Christians.

"*That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life;*

(*For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;*)

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."[1]

It must also be remembered that the prin-

[1] 1 John 1.

ciples on which the canon of Scripture was fixed, rested equally upon the religious experience of the judges. It was after consultation with the various churches that the votes of the early Christian fathers fixed for all time the canon of the New Testament, and the main reason that they had for their opinion upon these matters was the appeal or want of appeal of the passages and books to their own religious necessities. Thus the new cry which is heard everywhere to-day for experience instead of dogma is really a return to the old and original way. Paul and John were its first advocates. Jesus Christ Himself began it. Of course the inner tribunal cannot decide every question, nor will it give us any light upon matters merely historic and scientific. It will not even be uniform and infallible in its detailed answers to questions of spiritual principle, and there will be diversities of opinion among Christian believers even upon very serious matters. Still, it is alive, and it will lead us all in the end in the direction of the same ultimate truths. Whatever misunderstandings may at any time mar its testimony will drop away as more normal Christian experience succeeds that which has been more or less abnormal. We are not held by the dead hand of any external authority whatsoever. *We*

have the witness in ourselves—alive with our life, and leading us forward ever into new fields and aspects of truth.

Two very practical consequences emerge for the conscience of all who follow these lines of thought. In the first place the method of Christian advance is not and cannot be the laborious solution of separate doubts and questions in matters of detail. Thousands of such details are suggested by the Bible to every one of its readers. But Christian faith consists not in a uniform answer to all these questions. It is not gained by satisfying the manifold curiosities of the mind upon every sort of ancient information. It consists only in those assurances which are permanently and essentially religious. The only way to gain it is to trust the soul's deepest instincts when they are confronted by the traditions of the Church and the records of the Bible, and to appropriate as our living faith those assurances which the soul recognizes and claims as truth.

It follows also that if this be true there is a tremendous responsibility laid upon us all for the condition of our own souls. How pure and how ingenuous, how free from distracting self-will and weakening self-indulgence must that spirit be, which is to face the great task

of discerning the truth concerning God and righteousness and the meaning and duty of human life, as it scans the records of church experience and Bible revelation! This task of the spirit is indeed terrible in holiness. This high trust is sacred beyond words.

LECTURE III

THE CHARACTER OF GOD

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The Lord is good.—PSALM 100: 5.

HAVING argued that the starting point of faith and the ultimate seat of authority must be found within the soul of man, we now come to face the question of the content of that discovery. What truth is it that the soul of man contains, and in what sense does it contain truth? This question meets us first of all in connection with the idea of God, which is, of course, the supreme fact in religion. The mystics, as we have already seen, talk of finding God within the soul, and it is of the utmost importance that before going further we should face the question frankly as to the meaning of this claim of theirs. In what sense is God revealed within the soul?

This brings us at once back to the remembrance of an older psychology, which solved all such questions by its doctrine of innate ideas. This doctrine has been very crudely conceived and expressed. While the clearest

thinkers have perceived that the mind does not work from ready-made ideas with which it finds itself equipped, yet there is a wide-spread notion that somehow or other—below the limit of consciousness, it may be, and yet really present—certain definite and complete ideas are contained in the mind very much as its contents are contained in a box, and that one of the chief of these ideas is that of God. It cannot be too strongly emphasized that the idea of God is not a ready-made innate idea at all. No baby is capable of thinking of God in this fashion.

The phrase *innate ideas* is really a misleading expression. What is meant by it appears to be that, as the experience of life begins to make its conscious records, man discovers that he must inevitably hold certain conceptions of life which necessitate the existence of God and postulate it. It is within the mind that we find all our first hand knowledge of human life, and all ideas which are presented to the mind are judged by it to be either true or false to life, either congruous or incongruous with it. Innate ideas, therefore, are convictions without which our whole conception of life would be chaotic and unworkable. Presented to the mind dispassionately, as convictions held by other men or passed down to it by tradition,

they at once approve themselves as obviously included in the impression which life is making on us.[1] Expressed otherwise, we may say that God is the first revelation of experience-faith. For the moment we are thinking not of the form of God but of the fact of God. The form must be revealed otherwise, as we shall see; but the fact is realized as a necessary counterpart of all things known anywhere. Without it nothing is complete and nothing is intelligible. It is a necessary implication of all finite experience, without which everything loses its reality. Thus, literally, in Him all things live and move and have their being.

Astronomers tell us that the discovery of the planet Neptune was made, not because any telescope had seen it, but because astronomical phenomena which had been directly observed could not be explained without presupposing some such planet exercising its attraction upon the system which the telescopes were watching. In some similar fashion the human mind discovers that its system is neither com-

[1] Thus, as one may say, God is seen by the mind of man obliquely rather than directly, and it may have been some sort of notion of this kind which found such interesting expression in the words which Moses heard, telling him that no one can see the face of God and live, but that it was possible to see His back.

plete nor intelligible until it has been supplemented by the postulate of God.

The next step in the process is to supply a form for the bare fact thus demanded by the mind. The form of God is supplied to the Christian by the revelation of the Bible, and especially by the story and the teaching of Jesus Christ. To the Christian consciousness the form thus presented proves convincing. Viewing God under these aspects, the soul recognizes that this is what has been missing from life, and this is what it has been seeking. The fact of God is the postulate of all human experience: the form of God is the result of that mysterious process which the Bible describes as the Holy Spirit witnessing with our spirit within.

The conception which the fact of God assumes as it thus finds form, is essentially a moral conception. In the revelation of the Bible, the seer to whom the revelation is made receives more than he fully understands. The common man, being confused by many things, understands the seer only imperfectly. Yet both seer and common man have a certain equipment, not only for receiving the revelation, but for so far defining it. First, there is their own experience of conscience, and their own adventures in morality, whether

good or bad. That is to say a man's character, such as it is, contains within it on the one hand elements of condemnation and of shame for bad conduct, and of approval and satisfaction for good conduct of his own. Beyond these there is his imagination of what manner of man he would be if he were morally better than he is. Thus his moral ideas are not bounded by his own achievement, but are in every case further advanced than the progress he has been able to make. His imagination, which thus creates for him a moral ideal, is illuminated and guided by the idea of Jesus Christ, Who presented to man in His own person all that can be known of God on earth and under earthly conditions.

That presentation was moral through and through, and every aspect of God which is presented to men by Christ is essentially an ethical conception. Thus, to the awakening soul which is already aware of the fact of God from its own experience, the Bible, and especially Jesus Christ, provide the ideas which will determine the form of God. The normal human spirit would at once recognize these as true, but the deepest complication for human faith lies in the fact that no soul is completely normal. In this way there arise many hesitations, obscurations, and perver-

sions in the Christian man's idea of God. Because of his own moral defects he is not able justly and completely to deal with the revelation presented to him. Thus it comes to pass that we know but in part, and that we are capable of seeing God only in fragmentary glimpses.

It will naturally be said that if man's knowledge of God can at the best be so fragmentary, and must in every case be more or less distorted by the weakness or the error of his own moral nature and experience, a very serious objection arises against the whole argument of the inner authority. Does it not amount to this, that, since the moral experience of each man is different from that of every other, it must follow that if each of us is to be his own authority there will be as many gods as there are men? Each man has had his own individual moral life, and therefore each man will interpret God in a different way from the interpretation arrived at by any other.

To this our answer as Christians must be that God is not merely an idea but a living fact. He is not a theory but, in the strictest sense, a person. It would be impossible to lay too great stress upon this point. At the present time there is a very wide-spread tendency

to distrust the idea of personality in general. One sees it in regard to immortality, and a great many persons profess themselves willing to believe in human immortality so long as you do not insist that it is to be personal immortality. This is one of those refuges from difficulty which are entirely elusive and misleading. Non-personal immortality can only give comfort or satisfaction to any one so long as he refrains from examining the words he is using. Non-personal immortality must in every sense reduce itself ultimately to something like absorption into the general scheme of things, the widely embracing universe, into which the individual soul returns and with which it merges itself. It may suggest a set of noble ideas about joining

> "the choir invisible
> Of those immortal dead who live again
> In lives made better by their presence."

Now as a matter of fact this is to a certain type of mind very pleasant and alluring. To some it may even seem to be an object and ambition great enough to be worth much sacrifice. It is the sort of thing about which it is extremely easy to write poetry. But, with all that, one fact remains—it is not immortality. If you call it immortality you are using words

in a false sense, and it so happens that upon a subject like this, such use of words involves a very serious responsibility.

The same holds in regard to the personality of God. It is almost incredible that modern minds should prefer a fluid to a solid conception of the Deity, but so it is. They delight in the idea that God is immanent in all being, and that we are in touch with Him while we are enjoying or experiencing every phase of life. But they shrink back from every direct and personal contact in which spirit may meet with spirit. It would be difficult to find language strong enough to appeal to such persons, asking them whether it is God that they are seeking at all. For this diffused and formless deity, in which there is no definite and personal existence with whom we may talk and be understood, and who may impress His mind and will upon our spirits, is really only a way of conceiving of nature, and is not in any real sense God at all. Just as it would be more honest, and a great deal more useful, if the advocates of what they call impersonal immortality were to drop a word they have no right to use, and advocate instead of it posthumous fame, so it would be equally advantageous if those who talk of God and yet insist upon denying personality would leave the word

God alone, and frankly proclaim themselves worshippers of nature who have no God.

Most of us, if the truth be told, care not one straw what people will say of us after we are dead, and care very little how long our name or our influence will last; but we do care very greatly whether when we cry into the void there be any to answer, whether there be any will that backs our noblest struggles, and any heart that can love and sympathize. So, for our part, most of us retreat from abstruse discussions, and as we grow older find ourselves reverting to the child's simplicity towards which Christ led us. The long words and fine-drawn distinctions about which we used to argue in young days come to seem so very foolish and insignificant, and so amusingly inadequate, when we are trying to deal with the facts below the surface. And one by one we lay down our volumes with their philosophic definitions, and come home to our Father in the evening-time like little children.

All this, which may seem to be a digression, is really relevant to our present purpose. It is quite true that various minds will conceive of God in various ways, but our contention is that our hope of essential unity lies not in our views of Him but in the fact of God Himself. We believe in the actual and direct revelation

of this personal God to the soul of man. There may be differences of apprehension, but in the living fact there is one essential unity. There may be diversities of operations, but after all is said there is but one Spirit. God, the supreme fact of the universe, is revealed in the Bible, witnessed by the Church, seen in Jesus Christ. He is still out after every spirit He has made, and He meets them all according to their capacity for receiving Him.

The next question that faces us is the moral aspects of the God in Whom we are to believe. When the Psalmist of the one hundredth psalm fell back upon the assurance that *the Lord is good,* he was taking his stand upon the ultimate refuge of Christian faith. The moral quality of God is the essential characteristic of Christianity. There have been religions whose ultimate conception is that God is great, that He is wise, or that He is inscrutable and mysterious. We insist that, while all these are important, the one thing necessary for us is to be sure, and to remain sure, that He is good. "True religion is a conviction of the character of God."

This is not only a great but a fundamental principle. Religion may be conceived of as a device for promoting human morality, a guide to conduct, a text-book of morals, or a safe-

guard to public righteousness. It is indeed all that, but it is far more than that. The character of man is important, but the character of God is much more important. Our first duty is not to do good, it is not even to be good; it is to be sure that God is good. It is to be sure that, when we worship and look up to God, that to which we look is moral and not immoral. The great question is, What is back of the universe? What is the essential truth of it? Is there or is there not "an ultimate decency in things"?[1] It is true that even in the interests of human character the assurance of the goodness of God is of first importance. Our convictions about our deity are necessarily formative, and we consciously or unconsciously model our own lives upon that which we worship. Apart from this practical consideration, however, there is the far more serious question of the ultimate value of morality, which determines our choice between a moral and a cynical view of human life. We struggle hard for goodness, and, like John Milton,—strive to "justify the ways of God to men." Much depends upon whether we can succeed in this justification or not. If good-

[1] Readers of Dr. A. B. Bruce's works will remember the touching eagerness, and indeed almost passion, with which he emphasizes this point of ultimate appeal.

ness be simply a human convention, and the laws of morality nothing more than an expedient for the conduct of human life, our attitude towards them and towards all things will necessarily be very different from what it would be if morality were our way of being in tune with the universe.

The most deadly danger of our time is the moral scepticism which belittles the importance of righteousness and sin. If all that we call goodness is but an expedient for keeping man and society in order, and has no ultimate worth in it, then (if one may echo a famous phrase) the beauty of holiness is but a matter in the same class as the colours on a butterfly's wings, and the majesty of law has about the same ultimate importance as the protective spots in a beetle's back. The certainty of the ultimate worth of goodness is of the most fundamental importance. It has been the habit of the Church to address its God as One in "knowledge of Whom standeth our eternal life." It does not say "in obedience to Whom standeth our eternal life," but "in knowledge." The Church has found its eternal life in knowing that all that it taught men to strive for is part of the character of the eternal God. This is the greatest revelation of the Bible, the supreme message of Jesus.

It has been very generally held that anthropomorphism is the cause of wrong or inadequate conceptions of the character of God. "The god of a triangle would be a triangle," and the God of man will similarly be found in the likeness of man.

> "Man throws it up in air, it drops down
> Earth's."

Man is supposed to deify his own attributes; and, as man himself is very far from being morally perfect, his God naturally shares his failings. Thus the Greek gods and goddesses were simply glorified men and women of like passions with ourselves, and even the Christian conceptions are confused by the same vicious principle. Lecky has pointed out that in the religious art of the thirteenth century God is always represented as a pope in Italian pictures and as an emperor in German ones. A famous wit has told us that "An honest God's the noblest work of man." But as a matter of fact many of man's gods are very far from honest, and the wide variety of good and evil conceptions which is covered by the one word God in the history of religion, is supposed to be entirely due to the similar variety in the character of the men who formed these ideas of God. In the words of

Charles Dickens, "Verily, verily, travellers have seen many monstrous idols in many countries: but no human eyes have ever seen more daring, gross, and shocking images of the divine nature, than we poor creatures of the dust, make in our own likeness of our own bad passions."

In regard to this whole subject there is much to say for the probability that man has made his gods in his own image, and it is by no means to his discredit that he has done so. When one thinks of that rage for astronomical divinities which characterized the middle of the nineteenth century, one feels a kind of wonder at the popularity with which it was then received. Men fell upon the magnificent Olympians of the Greek Pantheon, and seemed to take a kind of truculent delight in reducing them to terms of spring and winter, of dawn and twilight, and of day and night. A still sadder exchange from the splendours of these same stories is made by those who adopt the modern cult of reducing them all to vegetables. Apollo turns out to be the apple-tree; Aphrodite, in sadly reduced circumstances, is no better than the mandrake; and Artemis herself has fallen to the low estate of a mere mugwort. One understood in older times that the Olympians came to Greece from the moun-

tain and the valley of Olympus, but now it would seem that they are only the latest arrivals from a neighbouring market-garden. The spirit of the present time revolts from all this and loves to think of the Olympians, and of noble divinities of other lands, as shadowy forms of men and women dimly remembered and passed on into tradition. They are not abstract virtues or vices, but strong and clear types of human life, bearing with them into their divine estate both the good and evil which entered into their human lives and clung to their legends.

While, however, one repudiates the reduction of these very human personalities to anything that is less than human, and admits that something of the imperfect character of the ancient gods must have been due to the humanness of their origin, yet it seems to me that the most reasonable explanation for the defective views which men have held concerning the character of their God or gods is not anthropomorphism. It is the extraordinary difficulty which confronts every seeker, in the facts of human life and the ways of Providence. Man, even in his savage condition, is not likely to attribute all that he finds in himself to his God. He tends to attribute the best that he finds within himself to the Higher

Power. He is intelligent enough to distinguish between his failure and his success in moral life, viewed under whatever lights he has. The farther he himself is from excellence, the more naturally does he appeal to a higher excellence than his own. We can see this very clearly illustrated in those tales of the Old Testament and of the Greek mythology in which mortals protest against the conduct of their God as they are able to see it. When Abraham asks, *Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?* he is protesting by the light of his own conscience against conduct on the part of God which he could not justify and would not adopt for himself. The same protest recurs in the book of Job, and the whole attitude of the earlier chapters of that book is precisely the same as Abraham's. The story of the Greek Titans further confirms this view, and the greatest of all the Greek stories, that of Prometheus, is a profound and far-seeing exposition of it. In the first of the three Prometheus plays Prometheus is entirely rebellious, and exclaims to Zeus, "Thou wist what unjust things I suffer." It is true that a reconciliation follows, much as in the book of Job, and a fuller understanding of divine ways leads Prometheus back from his rebellion into acquiescence. Shelley, however,

taking up the old tale, declines to follow Æschylus past the first phase, and has enriched our literature with perhaps the most daring protest against the ways of God that was ever penned by man.

Now it is to be noted that this protest is not blamed but honoured. Very patiently Job, Abraham, and the psalmists are led back to a higher truth, or a conviction of a deeper virtue in the God they have misunderstood, but in the meantime the bold remonstrance is not regarded as too bold. In Micah and in Isaiah Jehovah calls for argument with men. The attitude of protest is always treated honourably and respectfully. Jesus, in His teaching about the same problem, turns men's minds away from the inscrutable mystery of Providence and leads them to the Father by another road. He emphatically tells them that the victims of Pilate's massacre and of the falling tower of Siloam must not be regarded as sinners above all other sinners, whom God is punishing for their sins. These are the victims of Providence, which is but a religious way of speaking of the laws of nature; and in nature, as it has been excellently said, "there are no rewards or punishments: there are consequences." For the deeper view which, of course, is absolutely ethical, Jesus points His

disciples to Himself and tells them, *He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.*

The most familiar instance of anthropomorphism in religious thought is afforded by the fact that in general the first idea of God entertained by a child is gained from his knowledge of his parents. In so far as the father and the mother fail to stand for ideals which commend themselves to the child's conscience, his idea of God will fail. Either he will think of God as also failing in these respects, or he will appeal from the failure of the parents to some hoped-for nobility in the God they have misrepresented. Yet as a matter of fact human nature is more intelligent than people give it credit for, and in the main children will identify their thought of God with those qualities for which conscience and love are seeking. It is along this line that we see the greatness of Christ's psychology in the eternal phrase, *our Father.* That phrase alone is a magnificent protest against our attributing any of our human weaknesses to God. We are not such fools as to pass on to Him things which our own nature repudiates as unworthy of it. You are not good, and I am not good, but both of us would like to be good. We need and we demand a God better than ourselves. We look around to see if we

can find traces of Him in the world, but we find only that Providence which is so often apparently unreasonable, and which sometimes seems to be utterly immoral. In a word, the reason for our defective conceptions of God is not mainly our attributing to Him the poorer elements of our own character: it is our experience of nature and of life around us, which continually shock our moral sense by their regardlessness and apparent injustice. It appears then that the main cause of man's misunderstanding of God is his experience of life.[1]

It is conspicuously true that all arguments to the being of God from the facts of nature, like those of Butler's Analogy, cut both ways,

[1] "He that is unjust is also impious. For the Nature of the Universe, having made all reasonable creatures one for another, to the end that they should do one another good; more or less, according to the several persons and occasions; but in no wise hurt one another; it is manifest that he that doth transgress against this his will, is guilty of impiety towards the most ancient and venerable of all the Deities." How gladly would I believe this! That injustice is impiety, and indeed the supreme impiety, I will hold with my last breath; but it were the merest affectation of a noble sentiment if I supported my faith by such a reasoning. I see no single piece of strong testimony that justice is the law of the universe; I see suggestions incalculable tending to prove that it is not.—*Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft* (Gissing).

and tend quite as directly towards atheism as they do towards belief. Nature and the external facts of life, moving under the unbroken sweep of natural law, are certainly responsible for the majority of man's defective conceptions of his God, and the Prometheus of the Greek tragedy is typical of man in all ages protesting against the inferior morals of the powers about him.

There are relics of Providence in many popular conceptions of God which have survived even among Christians. Perhaps the most striking of these is the tendency to regard Him as jealous. While there is a sense in which purest righteousness must always be jealous, and must refuse to share its supreme rule with any rival which stands for unrighteous passion or desire, yet the idea of God grudging us the choicest gifts of life, of His watching with envious eyes the joy and love which any life may attain, is an idea which wherever it is found is nothing less than paganism. One sees it in the anxiety of some parents about the danger of specially dear and beautiful children, and in our amazing interpretation of the death of those we love most tenderly, as being due to some displeasure on the part of God that we have given our hearts to them. As we have said, there is nothing

that could be more obviously pagan than any such idea of a rivalry between love human and divine. Christ continually took our human love for a symbol and vehicle of the divine love, and taught men through their human affections to realize that, back of these and prompting them all, was the infinite love of the Father, more tender, more passionate, and more constant, than any of our human loves can be. His often repeated phrase was, after an appeal to their knowledge of how a human father acts, "How much more will your Father which is in heaven give good gifts unto His children." In other words, life as we know it at its best is good, but God is better than life; and it is because of that that we can trust Him and rejoice in Him.

Another point in which the character of God has been defectively conceived is that of vanity. In many of our hymns, and perhaps still more of our prayers, the God Who is addressed seems to be concerned about His glory and our praise of Him in a fashion which would make us ashamed of any friend who demanded such an attitude of adulation. It is probable that this is a survival of the pomps of ancient kingdoms and the royal splendours of barbaric states. We have taken these over into our conception of a heaven which is full

of preraphaelite decoration, and which would bore any sensible and well-conditioned young man to tears after a day of it. In all this meretricious splendour there is an unconscious blasphemy, and there is a very injurious misunderstanding of the meaning of God's glory and His delight in praise. All the teaching of the Bible goes to show that His glory is in the well-being of His creatures, and is but another fact of His love. He is glorified in His saints, and their best way of praising Him is to show in their lives some appreciation of His mercy and some likeness to His character.

Again, nothing is commoner than a fatalistic view of the arbitrary will and power of the Most High. This is no doubt connected with that fatalism which must have originally sprung from a sense of man's helplessness among the huge powers of nature, and which has sometimes corrupted the splendid basal truth of Calvinism and made the human heart rebel against its teachings. From this bad beginning it is easy to pass into still further lengths of misjudgment, and we frequently hear God referred to as "an angry judge." Has it never occurred to any of those who use that phrase that the first necessity for just judgment is that the judge shall be calm and impartial? An angry judge is a moral con-

tradiction in terms. It has led men still further astray, until whole nations have taken it as a first principle of religion that their God regards them with an altogether unjust partiality. The God of the Pharisees was a God of the most blatant favouritism, and the prophets of Israel were continually tilting against the blind conviction that Jerusalem and the Jewish nation, having been chosen by the Most High for His own, could never perish, however much they sinned.

These things are not generally expressed in so crude a fashion as this, but they haunt many a devout Christian soul until it regards resignation as the noblest of virtues. But resignation often implies an unexpressed sense of unreasonableness in the divine attitude and action towards men. If we believe God to be unreasonable, we have no right to be resigned to Him. The only decent attitude for a moral being is to rebel. Prometheus, Abraham, Job, and many of the psalmists take our breath away by their daring refusal to comply with actions which have not convinced their conscience, and it is only by such straight dealing that we shall ever reach the peace that comes of faith. "We can trust the good God in the end," says a famous Frenchman. We agree, but it is only because He will turn out to be the

good God that we have any right to trust Him. Connected with this sense of arbitrariness in God, is the still more widely diffused and lamentable fact that the God of many people is really devoid of all intelligence. The being which they think of as divine is one whose actions, and whose point of view generally, would be regarded as sheer stupidity in any mortal whom men were criticizing. This has been a sad plague to popular theology since the days when the prophets exclaimed against it in the memorable words, "He that made the eye, shall He not see?"

All these, and other seriously defective characteristics which have been attributed to God by loosely expressed doctrines including that of the atonement, are very serious factors in the religious problem of the present time. They are all phases of the same great curse of local gods which is the very essence of idolatry. When we talk about idolatry and heathenism, it is a great mistake to pass over all our criticisms at once to what we call heathen countries. There is idolatry in Christendom as well as outside it, and it is worse than that which it criticizes. Idolatry may be either a progress or a decline in a nation's religious life. In many a heathen land it is an advance from some poorer form of primitive

worship or fear, but for us it is always and only a decline and degeneration. Christianity proclaims the universal God, Father of all the universe, and in a special sense of all its human inhabitants. Man in his ignorant vanity allows his provincialism and the narrowness of his own interests to shrink his universe into a local club in which he and a certain number of his fellow mortals find their home. His God shrinks with the shrinkage of his world, and so you have at once, under whatever high sounding names of the Lord of Hosts or the Almighty God, a local deity with a narrower sphere of influence than many of the tribal gods of pagans. It has been admirably said of the deists by Anatole France that "The deists make a moral, philanthropical and prudish God for their own use, with Whom they enjoy the satisfaction of a perfect understanding, akin to the government, temperate, weighty, exempt from fanaticism." It is much to be feared that to many Christians the God Whom they worship is morally conceived in a still more unworthy fashion. To some He is but the head of the ecclesiastical party or denomination to which they belong. To others He is but the chief supporter of their peculiar theological tenets. It is inconceivable how much moral loss there has been to faith,

and ultimately to character, through this sort of thing. When the Highest Himself descends to the rôle of a mere partisan leader in church or state, what is there left to worship?

One can hear a protest from those to whom such lines of thought are new, "Forbear thee from meddling with God Who is with me." These words are indeed taken from the Bible, but they are the cry of a heathen king against Josiah of Israel, who presumably might have made a suitable reply. They are indeed echoed by many Christian people to-day. Thomas Carlyle was very indignant on hearing Hall preach eloquently upon *God that cannot lie*. Yet it is possible that not only Carlyle, but many who profess a far fuller religious faith than his, might do well to pause and see whether their conception of God will stand in the judgment of an ordinary man's conscience; and they may be very well assured that, if their God's principles and character cannot bear examination, He is not much of a God.

It is quite true that he who seeks to take away bad gods from men must substitute a God that is good. When we think of it, that was precisely what Christ did for the Pharisees, and it must have been a wonderful ex-

perience to those who followed Him to find that the God to Whom they looked, and Who held their spirits in His hand, was actually One Who could be counted upon for a reasonable understanding and a just judgment of their lives. The principle upon which Christ acted in this matter, and the principle which is involved in all such protests, is that the God Whom we worship must have the same moral standards as those which we find within our own breasts. The position is summed up admirably by Whittier in his famous saying, that

> "Nothing can be good in Him
> Which evil is in me."

We must refuse to admit that anything is good because God does it, and substitute for that error the truth that God does the thing because it is good. The former view has led in every age to a cringing attitude towards God in which conscience has disappeared. If goodness is an arbitrary matter depending upon the caprice of the Highest, then His Church will sooner or later model upon His morality. As a matter of fact this has often happened, and the result of it has been the evil doctrine of the end justifying the means, and of anything being legitimate which tended towards the glory of God or of the Church. The one vital

principle without which there is no security against all manner of degeneration is that the same principles of right and wrong which bind us bind Him also, and apply as strictly to the divine nature as to the human.

It is in this connection that we come in sight of the whole matter of man's communion with God. There have been many ways in which communion with God has been understood, and the religious world may be on the whole divided into two sections, according to its view in this matter. Worship in many lands has been regarded simply as the performance of a proper ritual. If one used the right words, and performed the right ceremonies punctually and carefully, a good relation was established between the worshipper and his God, whereas any failure or delay in these matters led to alienation and might be visited with punishment. We cannot too strongly insist that such worship presupposes an impossible God. The organ for knowing God is an intelligent conscience. The only communion worthy of the name consists in having a common thought and feeling about things in general, and a common conscience of good and evil, with Him. But if this be so it is obvious that every possibility of communion depends upon common standards, without

which there is nothing left for religion but mindless and conscienceless performances.

It is very wonderful how a common conscience leads us, under the guidance of Christ, to communion with God. Any event or experience of life may be taken up into this communion, but by far the most intimate and important element in it will be that which is produced by questions connected with sin and righteousness. Our very sins make us to know His goodness by the sharp and blinding contrast. If our God be moral along the same lines and with the same standards as we are, then indeed He is a consuming fire. The conscience of sin takes on a new terror when we realize that in transgressing our own standards we have ranked ourselves against our God. As the Arab in his prayer draws a circle around him in the sand and feels himself within that circle cut off from all the world and shut in with Allah, so our sins form a flaming circle around us. Nothing else in all the world matters but the fact that conscience turning to God exclaims, *Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned.* It is this that lends its desperate seriousness to the situation. It sweeps us past all other standards of morals, and makes it impossible for any intelligent man to take refuge in these, as so many pro-

fessed Christians do. Nothing can be justified merely because others do it, however good and admirable these others may be. The fire of our own conscience has come between us and them, shutting us in with a stricter tribunal. No plea of propriety, no guarantee of respectability counts for anything here. There can be no longer any meticulous trifling with petty sins, as if we were confronting a God Who was interested in our failures in the observance of ritual.

For within our fiery circle we discover love in the heart of purity. The perfect goodness of our God is not cold but passionate. He is not concerned with any breaches of arbitrary law. He is breaking His heart over the terrible black tragedy of real sins on the part of His worshippers. He is concerned about the huge calamity of man's transgressions. For Him, goodness—that very same goodness which judges us—is eternal and majestic. His righteousness is like great mountains and His judgments are deep as floods. He comes to us not as a merchant to bargain with us concerning our conduct, but as one who, seeing the utter tragedy of sin, can meet us only in the still more tragic redemption which we see in the cross of Christ.

Further, if His standards and ours are one,

in our communion with God we find Him building up our broken righteousness. God is essentially creative, and the most wonderful thing He makes is human character. The ideal goodness for man ceases to be mere abstinence from things forbidden, and becomes positive and practical, a creative righteousness in which we have fellowship with the aims of the Creator and build up about us our part of a righteous world. Thus His holiness and His love can bring us into His communion. He is separate from sinners not because His conduct of life is carried out upon different moral principles and standards from those which they must obey; but because, the standards being the same, we have failed of that identical righteousness which is righteousness for Him. But this separation brings us infinitely nearer God than anything else could have done. The bonds of common sin seem to unite men for a time but they ultimately separate them beyond all reunion. The bonds of a common standard, while they separate God and man by the most tragic gulf that can be found in the universe, yet have in them the promise of a possible ultimate reunion in which our fellowship with Him will be made perfect. For there is no such fellowship in all the world as that of forgiveness. The loneliness of the ghastly

discovery that sin is vain because God is good, and the impossibility of solving such a problem by any ritual performance or sacrificial act, lead the soul towards the wonder of forgiveness, the infinite comfort of reëstablished communion with the good God, and the eternal confidence and trust which that restoration brings, just because we have fellowship with Him in conscience as well as in grace. *In all their affliction He was afflicted*—most of all in the grievous affliction of their sin.

Out of all this there comes to each of us the rousing question of a very daring message. Do not complacently content yourself with your traditional God, but before all else in religion purify your thought of Him. Never for a moment allow yourself to think of Him either harshly or diplomatically. Lay hold upon Him not only with your weakness but with your strength: with your best of conscience as well as with your worst of shame. Revise also your theology. Cast out of it, even out of its most sacred traditions of the conduct and mind of God, all that is not good. Revise each doctrine separately and refuse to subscribe to any, upon whatsoever sanctions or under whatsoever plea, that does not satisfy your own conscience as to its rectitude. The God of many excellent people is not only not

good, He is not even sane or decent. You will make little headway in the religious life until you can trust your God. And this revisal must necessarily go farther, and lead to a revising of ethics also. Our consciences are so accustomed to bow in the house of Rimmon that it will take years for most of us to cleanse them of their moral prejudices and set them free from those little trifling proprieties which are so tyrannical over men. Each detail that affects the conscience ought to be taken out and held in the clear light of God until the conception of righteousness has ceased to be a matter of conventional proprieties, and is seen on large scale in some such massive reality as to satisfy your noblest aspirations. The righteousness of many is but a wide field full of mole-hills, but the righteousness to which God calls us is indeed like the great mountains. Then, when these corrections have been made, a man comes to know that there is an eternal backing for all his best endeavours, and finds in the character of God the last refuge and citadel for his faith.

Thus it is from within the soul that we reach the great persuasion that God is good. In the world of external experience we are constantly meeting with the tragic problems of Providence, and they bear us no such message

whatsoever. From the providential order of the world there must be found this escape. We shall never be able to reconcile the conscienceless and non-moral sweep of things in which we are carried onwards down the years with our persuasion of God's goodness and His love. From providential experience we must appeal, and escape into that deeper moral order whose evidence and certificate lies in the moral persuasions of the spirit of man. From that moral order, thank God, there is no escape. All that is within us reveals a God terrible in holiness, absolutely just, abundant in mercy. The world may be crazy and upside down, but God is good. I personally am lost and all bewildered and abroad, but God is good. My heart is broken or my heart is frozen, but God is good. I have destroyed myself, but God is good.

LECTURE IV

THE INCARNATE LOVE

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The word is nigh, even in thy mouth and in thy heart.—ROMANS 10:8.

The word was made flesh.—JOHN 1:14.

BEFORE the coming of Jesus Christ God had been revealing Himself to man through all the ages with a revelation which slowly but steadily grew clearer. We are accustomed to this thought in connection with the divine revelation made in the Old Testament. The point which I would like now to emphasize is that all that revelation was made within the souls of inspired men, and that the record of the Bible is really a record of spiritual experience rather than of externally given dogma. God never could be seen by man except as He revealed Himself within the soul of man. The lawgivers, the psalmists and the prophets received God within their souls, passed through amazing spiritual experiences, and sent the record of

these down in the written word. Thus, in a sense, the word had become flesh from the beginning of things. In every inspired man some word of God was incarnate. Dr. Peabody in a very remarkable note upon the text, *The word was made flesh,* helps us to realize that, in every man who is impressed by religious truth and who carries that truth out into character and outward life, that great principle of incarnation is fulfilled.[1] In all such translation of spiritual experience into conviction and character there is a hint that whatever God may choose to reveal of Himself will probably come to man by way of incarnation.

In the world outside of Palestine the same thing had been going on, although in a much dimmer and less perfect fashion. Every nation had had its own ideas of God, and in many nations the historian notes a definite advance in these. Beyond all other nations of the western world this is true of Greece. By her, God had been discovered as the great and constant counterpart to life, the necessary supplement without which no knowledge of ours can be intelligible. We have already seen how the discovery had been marred by the two great enemies of faith,—on the one hand the

[1] *Sunday Mornings in the College Chapel.*

tendency to anthropomorphism, and on the other hand the crude and quite unethical facts of Providence. In regard to these we took the position that it was the latter which most of all distorted man's conception of God; while the former, although it may be responsible for the attribution of certain human frailties to the Divine, yet, on the whole, tended towards real knowledge of God and approach to Him.

Yet there can be no doubt that anthropomorphism did sometimes mislead men. To guard against its danger there was a tendency among thinkers, both in Israel and outside of it, to go to the opposite extreme, disclaiming all similarity between divine and human nature, and separating God completely from man. In such a question as that of miracles we can see this tendency working. It has often puzzled Christian people to understand why the Pharisees were not satisfied with such miracles as Christ did, but were perpetually demanding from Him what He called signs and wonders. The explanation seems to be that in His miracles He was too kindly, too familiar, understanding and human. Such miracles as these, which were exactly the things which our human hearts would have prompted us to do for those whom we love, if we had had the power, never satisfied the

Pharisees just because they were so much in the line of human desire. The signs and wonders which would have pleased them were evidently things which had no human nature in them at all. A leap from the temple pinnacle, a miraculous descent from the cross, or some startling disarrangement of astronomical or other laws of nature—these were what they wanted. This may have been a perverted result of their fear of anthropomorphic views of God, which they would have associated with idolatry. As a matter of fact they fell into a far greater danger of idolatry by emptying God of human attributes and worshipping an unhuman conception. There can be little question that the third temptation of Jesus represents a suggestion that He might conduct His ministry more effectively by yielding to this desire on the part of Jewish religious leaders, and might exchange His deeds of human kindness for others simply astonishing, in which there was no manifestation of sympathy or of love for man.

The incarnation of God in Jesus is in itself an answer to all earth's deepest questions. It is the final verdict which decides the question of the relation between God and man. It has been supposed by the Pharisaic party of all nations and times to involve a limitation, a

humanizing of God which made Him less divine. Christ's contention was that that limitation and humanizing, instead of being a defect, was really a tremendous power. He held and taught that God was not less God for appearing in the form of a man, and that there was nothing essentially unnatural in the incarnation. The proof of the divinity used to be sought in making God as unlike to man as possible. Christ insists that man's conception of God cannot be too human, and that the word divine is not the equivalent of unhuman.

At the period when the fourth gospel was written there was one of those great and significant confluences of various streams of thought which have always marked an advance in the intellectual and spiritual life of the world. The Greek and the Hebrew streams then met as they had never done before. All the world was out for a fuller knowledge of God, and was seeking in one way or another for a real approach, in which man would find God nearer to human nature than He had been conceived to be. Plato had found God along the lines of human intellect and thought, and in this way had established a real connection between the human and the divine. Still that connection left man very wistful. The eternal ideas dwelt in heaven, and

man's thoughts were but the shadows and reflections of these. The brilliant metaphor of the cave is one of the abiding masterpieces of philosophic insight. Man, lying on his back within the cave, across whose mouth ran a low wall, could not see the procession that passed the entrance. But, looking upwards from the floor of the cave, he could see the movement of dim forms which were the shadows cast upon the cave's roof, as the procession passed. This was all that he could share of the divine ideas. It was much but it was not enough. It linked on human life with the divine through the medium of thought, and taught man to think magnificently of his own thinking.

Yet there was no real sympathetic contact between God and man. The two had not really met. One sees the same defect in the splendid conception of Apollo and his worship and his oracles of Delphi and of Delos. In a very remarkable study of this subject published a few years ago by Wilamowitz the following passages occur:—"Know thyself—by which was meant Know that thou art a mortal man, and know it here, face to face with my eternal and divine majesty." "The cult of Apollo renounces the whole domain of mysticism, for its god has no direct communion with

humanity. It renounces that disburdening of the soul which takes place in all forms of ecstasy when man passes beyond himself. And therewith, to a great extent, it also renounces hope." In the *Alkestis* it will be remembered that Apollo cannot remain in the house of his friend and host Admetos when death has visited the mansion. To escape defilement he disappears. He had been a friendly and a welcome presence there, but when life reached its point of greatest need, his immortality separated him from mortals and he failed them. Instead of him comes Herakles, half god and half man. He has no scruples about defilement, but wrestles with death and brings back Alkestis to the sunshine. In this we see the Greek desire of man's soul for communion with his God, the baffling necessity which must forever separate the human from the divine, and the pathetic expedient of bridging that gulf by the creation of demigods. Similarly, we have the stories of Æsculapius, and the famous inscription upon the cupola of one of his temples, "Being come to this place the Son of God loved it exceedingly." This goes far in its approach to the idea of the incarnation, and it will be noticed that both with Herakles and with Æsculapius it is for the sake of restoring mortals from

sickness to health and from death to life that the approach is made, thus anticipating in a very striking manner the ministry of Jesus.

Yet all these legends were dealing with a thing which obviously they did not understand. The cult of Herakles or of Æsculapius can hardly be called a faith. Their incarnation was a mystery rather than an active belief. It was the beautiful and dreamy reflex of man's desires, in the heart of which there lay a certain hope that these desires might prove to be the shadowy revelations of the truth that man was nearer to his God than he had dared to think. They may be called incarnation without faith. And after all, the Greek demi-gods and even the gods themselves had been men to begin with, and had little in common with the speculations of the philosophers concerning the divine. The result of it all was this, that the mysterious deity lay on his couch of stars thinking his wondrous thoughts, while far down the gulf this little world of mortals lived in the twilight of these thoughts of God.

In the Hebrew Scriptures the most characteristic feature is the wonderful nearness of God and man. From the earliest days God walks with man and speaks to him in the most

friendly and understanding fashion. Abraham is the friend of God. Moses receives overwhelming assurances of the abundance of His mercy and truth and goodness which have become classics of religious consolation. The prophets recall man from the distance to which his sins have driven him, to a God nigh at hand and longing for man's love. Yet for a long time these oracles had been dumb, and the Jewish religion as it was in the time of Christ had got separated very far from its God. Jehovah still stood supreme over Israel, but He was the austere Lord of righteousness and command, Who had lost all the human tenderness of the God of Amos and Hosea, and Whose dealing with man might be most justly conceived as that of one sitting upon a judgment seat and watching the procession of mortals trooping past for doom.

At this time a new philosophy was arising, associated chiefly with the name of Philo the Jew, and it arose out of the need that was felt by Jews and Greeks alike for getting God and man nearer to one another. It took up into its capacious spirit the Old Testament literature and the Platonic philosophy and made a blend of them. It conceived of wisdom in various ways. Sometimes it was personified, and a wonderful romance was woven about its

career. At other times it was dreamy and indistinct, rather an attribute than a person. Now it was a mere quality in man and God: then it was a soul, in itself more or less divine. Even this suggestion of a unity between the human and the divine brought the wistfulness of the world flocking to its teaching in the desire to get nearer to its God. Zoroastrians contributed to it their lore of angels and of devils. From the Far East Buddhism, with its sense of the infinite separation between God and the world, suggested the necessity for a mediating power of some sort. At last the system took romantic shape in the tale of the æons. These, representing the various human powers of mind and soul, came trooping out from God. Human wisdom, the last thing that wandered forth from the Father, got so far away from Him as to lose hold, and seeking to leap back into His bosom fell down the unfathomable abyss and became the light of the world's dim knowledge. It is easy to smile at all this and to call it a grotesque picture of master-truths of life, but it would be well to remember that "sense of tears in mortal things" to which Euripides had given such wonderful expression, that cry of man for some approach of God which was heard in every land.

Into this world at some stage or other there fell the marvellous words, *The word was made flesh.* It was a revolutionary and also a fulfilling word. It shattered forever the sorrow of the ancient world and made its hope articulate. It accepted the fact that all that any one can know of God must be known within his own soul; and it interpreted that fact, not by any fantastic story of æons, but by the record of a life which was known to be indisputable historic fact. The only way in which any solution for the mystery could be found was incarnation, and in Jesus Christ that incarnation took place.

The doctrine of the incarnation and the great words, *The word was made flesh,* have presented apparently insuperable difficulties to many minds. The author of *Ecce Homo* has said, "*The word was made flesh.* Present the saying to an ordinary man, and if he answered the truth he would say that he did not understand it. He will answer that he *believes* it, by which he means that as the words make no impression whatever upon his mind, so they excite no opposition in it. Present the same word to a thinker. It will overwhelm him with difficulty. He will sigh, and you will hear him murmur that it is a great saying, but he fears he shall never believe it." These

words are weighty and they are very impressive. It is perhaps presumptuous to challenge them, for they will be admitted by a very large number of grave and earnest men in our generation. Yet one cannot but remember that very many thinkers at the time when the text was first spoken must have found in them no new thing difficult of belief, but a solution of the whole effort of the thought of the ancient world. The Hebrew insisted that God had made man in His own image, by which presumably he meant that man is capable of receiving and expressing God in his human nature. The Greek admitted that all possible discovery of God must be within the soul, and all that had ever been known of God was indeed a word manifest in the flesh. Both Hebrew and Greek would have shrunk back from a God that was not similar to man, with a horror which no other conception could have produced. There is nothing conceivable so hideous as the idea of man finding himself in the power of a being essentially different from himself. Swift,[1] in his rough way, set us shuddering at the bare imagination of a race of horses having domination over human spirits, and that is but a suggestion of the hideousness of any kind of God who is incapable

[1] *Gulliver's Travels.*

of being manifest in the flesh. The flesh was weak and its medium very obscuring, and in consequence of this the word thus manifest was very partially intelligible, either to the Hebrew or to the Greek. Yet the dominant conception of the revelation of God in the flesh had set the lines for all possible revelation. The Word must become flesh in some fuller and completer form than man had ever known. The incarnation was the one and only way of God's manifestation to man which was to be expected upon the earth. From the beginning God had been the true light that, coming into the world, lighteth every man. Nothing could have been more probable, and nothing more obviously fitting when it was manifest, than that One should come at last saying, *I am the light of the world.*

All that has been said so far has been an attempt to show the relation between the main thesis of these lectures, namely the inwardness of the ultimate foundations of faith, and the external historic fact of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. There was something in common between man and God which made it natural that when He chose to reveal Himself fully to man it should be in a human life rather than in external oracles of any sort. It remains for us to illustrate this thesis by ap-

plying its principle to the three great doctrines of incarnation, atonement, and resurrection.

1. The Incarnation. The soul may be regarded in the first place as the seat of consciousness and thought. If man is to find God within himself, a certain amount of that discovery will be made along purely intellectual lines. As his mind exercises itself in knowledge he will find himself in contact with the eternal thoughts, while he is thinking his own. Much of our knowledge consists of memories of our past experience and other purely personal details, as well as of our consciousness of things and events external to us and our judgments concerning these. It is true that even upon such matters there falls at times a mysterious light which takes them into a higher region and reveals God in the incidents of our every-day life. But besides such divine interpretations of common things, there is more. We are visited by "thoughts sublime that pierce the night like stars," and in our thinking upon spiritual things we find ourselves in a region which, in the famous words of Euripides, is "divine or human or both mixed." It was this consciousness of a divine element mingling with common knowledge that suggested the Dæmon of Socrates,

and there never was a more impressive suggestion than that. There are times when even the most commonplace mind is smitten with a light which awes, and sometimes terrifies it, and a voice comes out of the fire saying, *Put off thy shoes from off thy feet; for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground.* The more loftily we think, the more certain we are that it is not only we but God thinking in us.

When men are framing ideals for humanity or seeking to plan their own lives upon the highest plane, they are (and the wisest of them know that they are) thinking over again thoughts of God. Whenever thought rises to any exaltation it discloses its secret, and men know that they are in contact with that from which it sprang, its eternal fountains in the mind that governs the universe. It follows from all this that we should expect the full revelation of God not to be a revelation of alien truth or beauty or goodness, but something essentially intelligible to man's intellect, and somehow familiar to all who had realized the divine meaning and presence in their own thinking. The revelation of God within the mind of man will be a revelation of the same nature as his own intellectual persuasions, but different from these in its perfect clearness,

its sure confirmation, and its established permanence.

It is along such lines that we can best understand the meaning of the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The clue to it lies within our own souls. There is indeed infinitely more there than there ever has been or will be in mere mortal man; but unless it were intelligible to him along the lines of his own thinking it would have no point of contact with him, and would be entirely useless for the purposes of faith. This contact is precisely the thing which Christ accomplished.

Much has been said in recent years of the originality of Christ's teaching, and much of that has great interest and value. Mr. Lecky has expressed this view admirably: "Nothing can, as I conceive, be more erroneous or superficial than the reasonings of those who maintain that the moral element of Christianity has in it nothing distinctive or peculiar. The method of this school, of which Bolingbroke may be regarded as the type, is to collect from the writings of different heathen writers certain isolated passages embodying precepts that were inculcated by Christianity; and when the collection had become very large, the task was supposed to be accomplished. But the true originality of a system

of moral teaching depends not so much upon the elements of which it is composed, as upon the manner in which they are fused into a symmetrical whole, upon the proportionate value that is attached to different qualities, or, to state the same thing by a single word, upon the type of character that is formed. Now it is quite certain that the Christian type differs not only in degree, but in kind, from the Pagan one."

Yet one must be very guarded in pursuing this line of argument. Suppose we were able to separate the teachings of Jesus from all that had been said before, that would be rather an added difficulty than an aid to faith. It would lead us to view the Christian religion as a new religion rivalling the others by the claim it makes to new discoveries and revelations of truth. Thus it would tend to an estimate of Christianity as but another religion among the many that had already existed: doubtless the best and most advanced of them all, yet somehow to be judged as upon their level. But Christianity is not a rival religion, either to Judaism or to Buddhism or to any other. Christianity is the religion of the world, the only religion. It takes up into itself all that is true in all the other revelations of God to man. It does not boast that it is

better than these, nor even fuller. It professes to be God manifest in the flesh, and proclaims that, in this manifestation, everything that God has allowed man to discover concerning himself in any faith, is not only included but is fully and finally interpreted.

Thus it would seem that the splendour of Christ's revelation is really its non-originality. It is because in it one finds all that any man had ever found of God that we profess to believe that Jesus is in a quite unique sense the way and the truth; taking up into Himself, glorifying and confirming, all true thoughts of God which it has ever entered the mind of man to conceive. The enemies of Christianity have often thought that they had done it an injury by offering quotations from the words of Buddha or Confucius or the Old Testament, and pointing out that in sayings corresponding to these Jesus was not original. The answer has too often been an attempt to show that these quotations did not mean what Jesus meant, and to discredit or belittle their value. I would suggest that the real answer to any such charges is to admit them all and glory in them. It is surely unnecessary to deny that these other teachers may have discovered or had revealed to them many truths concerning God and human life, and the more

of these that we can find, the better for our faith in Christ. It is fantastic to imagine that He borrowed His sayings from sources such as these, but the fact that in His teaching He embodied all the truth of the ancient world, along with the new revelations which He made, surely adds to the completeness of our conception that in Him we have indeed the word made flesh.

The thought of Jesus penetrated to God continually, and gave to His disciples daily the solution of the world's deepest problems and darkest questions. He who studies the thoughts and words of Jesus will find upon any subject the mind of God.

> "The acknowledgment of God in Christ,
> Accepted by thy reason, solves for thee
> All questions in the earth and out of it."

This was plainly the sense in which Jesus understood His own teaching and personality. *He that hath seen me hath seen the Father,* was His own saying, and that involves not merely a vision once seen and then passed away from. It involves a change upon all future vision. Henceforth, in the light of Christ, man will see the Father and hear Him speak in the exercise of his own intellect.

2. If, however, we have rightly regarded man's intellectual processes as a preparation for the perfect revelation of the truth of God in the human mind of Jesus, we have to face a further problem in the question of man's conscience as a medium of revelation. In our lecture upon the Character of God we had an opportunity of seeing how deeply the matter of ethics enters into our religious life, and how it determines the form which we give to the fact of God. Now for man the medium of moral faculty is conscience, so that if God chooses to make final revelation of Himself to man it must be through this medium also.

Conscience in man, although absolutely necessary, has been singularly defective as an organ of revelation. For one thing it has usually been *post eventum*. Its highest use is to warn men from evil, as the danger-signal of the soul. As a matter of fact it usually remains silent, or very mildly protesting, during the period of temptation, whose glamour is left to play unchecked upon man's spirit. It is only after sin has been committed that conscience wakens and becomes eloquent. The utter unfairness of the way in which conscience deals with men is certainly one of the deepest mysteries of Providence. Looking back upon the tragedy of sin, men feel that

they have been cheated in this thing, that their conscience has neither principles nor good sense nor even manners. They feel that if it had spoken before, as it so savagely speaks afterwards, they had been saved from life's tragedies. In this way conscience certainly distorts the image of God and plays into the hands of those false appearances of arbitrariness or worse, which are suggested by Providence as we experience it. The only semblance of escape from this that unaided man has ever found lies in pain. Granted that conscience has treated us unfairly, at least its scourging may make us wise; and the painful consequences of sins, not only in shame and humiliation, but in social derangements and even physical disaster, seem to give some hope of a recovery. It is a very vague and faint hope. Too often does its light fall back upon the past rather than forward into the future, showing us the foolishness and the badness of the choices we have made, rather than the possibilities of better things along the future road. Still, in this dim and uncertain way, a hint is given of how pain may possibly work out purity. It is not enough, but it is all we have.

It was natural then that, in the full revelation of God to man, a human conscience

should be exhibited, working in all that perfection which every conscience lacked. Where the minds of men were dull in the hour of temptation the mind of Christ was peculiarly alert, and He discerned the meaning of His temptations with an insight and a foresight which utterly baffled them. Where the conscience of men around Him was drugged and stupefied by conventionality and prejudice, He saw clearly to the innermost fact of things, and denounced the Pharisees with the scathing power of light shining in a dark place. All through His life we see the spectacle of sins fleeing before Him, revealed and naked in their sinfulness. As the enemy and pursuer of human sins, He stands unique among the teachers of all time. In penitent hearts upon which sin has wrought its cruel work, there is forever the same eager cry for forgiveness; and men recognize in Him a relation to conscience which enables Him not merely to disclose the ambushes of sin and to reveal its evil, but to deal with its victims also, and to bring back to them beauty for the ashes of sin's spent fires. Thus He boldly approached the penitents with the forgiveness of their sins. He was not perplexed by the question angrily asked by His enemies—*Who can forgive sins but God only?* He was conscious

of bearing to man this divine gift: *The Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins.*

Yet all this in His life was obviously preliminary. Enwrapped in mysteries which none of us can penetrate, and on which it is perhaps idle to theorize, lies the dread climax of Christ's action upon the moral life of man. Even in his own experience man had found that the one hope for irrevocable sin was pain. It was a glimmer of light as from afar, until He, not content with revealing the nature of sin and forgiveness to its victim, actually and with the utmost deliberation proclaimed Himself as One who bore the sin of the world and gave His life a ransom for many. There is no need to speculate as to the precise theological meaning of such words. From all such speculations the Gospels direct our eyes to the cross of Calvary and to the explanations of that cross which Jesus Himself had given. There we find One Who is at once just and the justifier of them that believe in Him. There we find sin confronted by love and pain, and the result is not, as in the former human case, a mere suggestion of some way of escape from sin. It is the effective and victorious end of the long human tragedy. It is the triumph of righteousness over iniquity and of conscience over guilt. Thus, as in the former case we

saw that the word *intellect* had become flesh in Him, so here we find that the word *righteousness* also became flesh.

3. Besides the intellectual and moral elements in human nature, which must be reckoned with when we speak of God as incarnate in man's flesh, there is another element, largely emotional, of which we must take account. No experience of the human spirit is more wonderful and characteristic than its spring of gladness and its sense of the worth of life. In spite of all depressions, this spring breaks forth in desert places continually, and astonishes the spirit of man with its refreshments. Every birth brings it to the mother-heart. Every springtime awakens forgotten gladness and vitality in the young. Every wayside joy and natural pleasure comes, not only as a surprising kindness on the part of nature, but somehow also as a revelation of the deepest truth of things. The view of life that we have in such experiences is the most convincing of all things we know. Those who do not feel it may say that it is too good to be true; but those who do feel it know in the deep souls of them that it is too good not to be true. Just as the loveless and the cynical call the passion of lovers insanity, while the lovers themselves know that no one is ever

sane except when he is in love, this indomitable faith in life is an indestructible element in human nature. It has survived the pessimisms of all the centuries, and, still more amazing, it survives the sorrows of the vast majority of human spirits. It is continually discouraged and baffled by the actual facts of life. We fain would hope in its shout of glad assurance, but we are neither brave enough nor big enough to carry its torch erect and steady through our darkest hours. Yet, however much we have failed in our courageous faith in life, it has not altogether failed us. After every discouraging hour when its light seemed wholly quenched, it rises again and shines upon us to the end.

It rises again, and in its rising we have that which makes us understand the doctrine of Christ's resurrection. The resurrection is not to be regarded as an isolated miracle which has no relation to human experience at all, except merely as a promise or prophecy of a future life for men who die. It is the fulfillment of all that is wholesomest in every soul of man. When He rose from the dead, Christ was literally the first fruits of them that slept. The triumph of life, the persistence and authority of joy, have always been demanded by the human spirit as things so obviously char-

acteristic of normal life that they bear their own evidence when they come to us. Surely it was natural that in any revelation of the highest, these things should also have their place. Their place is here. In the risen Christ we see them triumphing over death, and we understand the claim and the demand of all bright hours upon our spirit as they pass, telling us that this is the life indeed, and that the shadows are but futilities. And here we have not merely a confirmation of our own brightest and most hopeful hours. We have also in epitome the whole history of the world. Calvary and then resurrection, these are God's method in the history of nations and in the souls of men.

In our facile and luxurious way, we ask for our lives a smooth progress from which struggle and disappointment shall be altogether omitted. We feel aggrieved at the backward swirls of history, in whose reaction great promises seem to be sucked down, and man's faith and hope in the destiny of his race to be drowned. Taking the resurrection as the culmination of the death we find that such smooth progress, undisappointed and unbroken, is God's way neither with His world nor with its individual inhabitants. From the corn of wheat that must fall into the ground

and die, up to the very life of the Son of God Who must needs journey to Jerusalem and suffer of them and be raised again, it is the same story. Thus we have learned God's method of leading on His world, and that learning fixes our hope and faith into the solid facts of history, and confirms all that belief in life and acceptance of its gladness which seem so convincing to the normal soul in hours of health and joy. We have dreamed these things, but our dreams come true when we stand with Christ in Joseph's garden in the morning sunshine, and look back and understand the cross. Here then, in the resurrection of Jesus, the word *hope* is made flesh.

The word became flesh. What word? The answer must be, Every word of God that had been spoken in the soul of man. Three such words we have considered to-day under the categories of thought, righteousness, and hope. But these are only three out of the immense vocabulary of the language of God in human nature, and the story of Jesus is the fulfilling of them all. We have seen things through a glass darkly. We have heard words muffled and confused with the roar of life. Here we see them with open face and we hear them ringing clear and convincing. Incarnation, atonement, resurrection, they are the key

to all our experience. They are the very epitome of all our human life. Everything within man from the beginning has been undergoing them, misunderstanding them, hinting at them, crying for them. So far from being incredible they are the commonest things in the world, the most natural and inevitable. For each of us these constitute the very truth of life as we know it. Thus everything that is within us points towards Christ and leads back to Christ. Here is the true story of the Son of Man, and, in His lowly fashion, it is the true story of every son of man.

The word became flesh,—what word? Love—for all the other words are summed up in that. In the lecture upon the Character of God we strove to find reasons for vindicating that character to man, but they were reasons which deal almost exclusively with the qualities of justice and of righteousness. Yet, after all, these are but minor parts of His character and He is more than they. Our conscience seeks primarily for these in its demand that the Judge of all the earth shall do right. But all that is within us seeks for another thing in Him, of which we have not yet heard. It has been nobly said that

> "A loving worm within its clod
> Is diviner than a loveless God."

Our own love tells us this in the same convincing fashion as our belief in life demands for us the truth of the resurrection. All that we have said may be summed up in this one word. It is the discovery that there is no loveless God. God is love, and all our experience is just the revelation of that love. This is the fundamental fact in all the universe, without which all faith is futile. "Those have been called geniuses and God-sent prophets who once again go back to the beginning and present a *new* question to the world. The new question which Jesus presented was the word directed to the God of the Jews: Art Thou truly a God of wrath, and is the world truly miserable only because Thy curse rests upon it? The law answers Yes to this question, but the whole world answers a thousand times, *No*. This it was that appeared to the people so surprisingly new and comforting in His preaching, the new word to Israel, that God was the loving Father of man." [1]

For, in the last analysis, we discover that love is not only the most superb experience of life, but that it is in a sense life itself. It is the underlying principle which constitutes all the other elements of life when they are real and normal. Thought itself is no dry and

[1] *New Testament Times*, Hausrath.

loveless faculty. All constructive thought is that kind of spiritual artistry which is impelled to work because it loves the ideas it creates. Conscience has been supposed to be the age-long rival of affection, and righteousness has been contrasted to love as an opposing force. Yet there is no righteousness which is complete or effective that is not ultimately composed of and inspired by love. Loveless righteousness is not righteousness in a full or comprehensive sense. In all love that is worthy of the name there is the element not merely of gratification but of restraint, and that element of righteousness which acts as a restraining force to the impetuousness of desire is an integral part of real love. Just as love without righteousness is a wild and unstable thing which swiftly runs upon suicide, so righteousness without love is not even righteousness. Equity it may be, or dead justice insisting upon its pound of flesh, but these are low forms of character which need the enrichment and the elevation of love before they are worthy of the name of righteousness. Similarly all true hope has love in the heart of it. The happy belief in life that claims the resurrection as so wonderful an expression of human truth, is only parodied by the light-hearted

and shallow optimism which is a matter rather of digestion than of spirituality, a butterfly hopefulness founded upon nothing. Add, however, to this bright and alluring toy of the soul, the element of a deep-seated love, and in hope you have but love's unconscious grasp of its inheritance. It does not follow that because we cannot help hoping for something we shall get it, but it does most assuredly follow that no real love in the universe has ever finally failed of its desire. And it is this element of love in hope which is most marked in the story of Christ's resurrection. It was only to beloved ones that He appeared. The whole doctrine, which has too often been regarded as an exhibition of the mere power of God, is always in the Scripture narratives expressed in the sweeter and deeper terms of the love of God made manifest even in death.

All these are the work of love: they are the ways of love. When these were seen and heard and handled in the human life of Jesus, the last and greatest and dearest word of all the universe, the word love, became flesh. This cannot be too strongly emphasized nor too often repeated. It was the theme of Dante's *Divina Commedia.* It is the perpetual and ever-recurring note of Robert Browning. It is in some form or other the great dis-

covery of all trustworthy explorers of human nature. In every scientist and student the passion for learning is but an austere development of love. Without love, the redemption of sin, and the belief in life passing on to a hope of immortality, miss their most essential and vital element. It is this which is the crux of the modern social conscience. When that is taken up by the loveless as a mere development of science to be prosecuted by such tools as tables of statistics, it is one of the most barren and unattractive of all the forms of modern life. When it is inspired by love, its students are able to press on towards further knowledge of its truths, and to build up out of it a science of redemption and of hope which keeps them human amidst all life's treachery, and indomitable in spite of its constant failures and disappointments. It is in view of this fact that one feels so strongly the necessity of religion to successful social reform. To the thoughtless, the modern watchwords concerning wages and housing and votes may seem twenty centuries removed from the old stories of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Yet unless they are the perpetuation of these ancient stories, and unless the spirit of incarnation, redemption, and resurrection lives on in them, they wither be-

fore their time and fall from the tree of human development as shrivelled leaves. In a word, all man's experiences are in some form or other love's adventures. Dante was well advised when he divided even sins by this category, as love excessive, love defective, and love perverted. Our scientific thinking, the work of conscience, and the upward leap or downward drooping of the spirit, are but love's experiments, its blundering attempts at expression. Thus in Jesus Christ we find the perfect work of love. In that light we see light clearly upon every part of our earthly life; for He, being the incarnate love, hath brought life as well as immortality to light.

LECTURE V

MEANS AND ENDS

LECTURE V

MEANS AND ENDS

Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord.—JAMES 5: 11.

SO far we have been occupied in the first place with the attempt to find the foundations for our faith, and have seen that these cannot be traced down to metaphysical ultimates, so that the structure of faith must be built from the cross-section of experience. In regard to the offer of authority made by the Church and by the Bible, we have seen that these also can only be authoritative by the appeal they make to the inner tribunal. Passing on to the content of religious knowledge we have found that the first essential element in that is a God Whose moral character we can know and trust, and in dealing with Whom we may and must apply the ordinary moral standards which are applied in other regions. Finally, we have found that this great bond of moral standard gives us such a unity between God and man as to make

the incarnation with its developments in the crucifixion and resurrection so natural, and indeed inevitable, that we find in Christ the convincing revelation of God to the soul.

Looking back over the field of recent, and indeed of ancient controversy, we find that a great deal of the disputing has seemed to pass by the questions with which we have been concerned in these lectures. If these are the real fundamentals of faith, then much of religious controversy has been little better than beating the air. It has been concerned with names and words which refer largely to metaphysical distinctions so recondite and far off from living experience that it is questionable whether any one, either at the time of the controversy or before or since, really understood what he meant by them. We are confronted by vast masses of traditional detail in connection with such controversies, which have been held by the more conservative combatants with strenuous tenacity against the inroad of scientific ideas. If it should appear that many of these controversies are entirely irrelevant, and have very little or nothing to do with essential Christianity at all, we may hope to find some appropriate way of conceiving the situation and dealing with it in a reconciling and constructive spirit.

In the present lecture I wish to throw out some hints as to how this may be done. In regard to detailed controversies, I am not espousing either one side or the other. Most of them concern matters which can only be rightly decided by experts in comparatively narrow fields of study, and the opinion of one who is not an expert in these details must count for very little. But, without being experts in the details of science and criticism, it is possible for us to seek and find a just view of the whole situation, and a calm and Christian tolerance, which will leave each man to take the way which, on the whole, appeals to him as the most reasonable and best authenticated. There is no need to get angry and to try to settle such controversy, either by unchurching a man as a heretic or scorning him as a fool, although his way of thinking may be different from one's own. Until the Church has learned that, and put it into practice, she will find herself very seriously handicapped in her attempt to impress the mind of thinkers who are outside her pale.

I have called this lecture by the name of Means and Ends. In order to make this title intelligible I would refer you to a quotation from Matthew Arnold's *Culture and An-*

archy: "Faith in machinery is, I said, our besetting danger; often in machinery most absurdly disproportioned to the end which this machinery, if it is to do any good at all, is to serve; but always in machinery, as if it had a value in and for itself. What is freedom but machinery? What is population but machinery? What is coal but machinery? What is wealth but machinery? What are, even, religious organizations but machinery? Now almost every voice in England is accustomed to speak of these things as if they were precious ends in themselves, and therefore had some of the characters of perfection indisputably joined to them. I have before now noticed Mr. Roebuck's stock argument for proving the greatness and happiness of England as she is, and for quite stopping the mouths of all gainsayers. Mr. Roebuck is never weary of reiterating this argument of his, so I do not know why I should be weary of noticing it. 'May not every man in England say what he likes?'—Mr. Roebuck perpetually asks; and that, he thinks, is quite sufficient, and when every man may say what he likes, our aspirations ought to be satisfied. But the aspirations of culture, which is the study of perfection, are not satisfied, unless what men say, when they may say what they

like, is worth saying,—has good in it, and more good than bad. In the same way the *Times*, replying to some foreign strictures on the dress, looks, and behaviour of the English abroad, urges that the English ideal is that every one should be free to do and to look just as he likes. But culture indefatigably tries, not to make what each raw person may like the rule by which he fashions himself; but to draw ever nearer to a sense of what is indeed beautiful, graceful, and becoming, and to get the raw person to like that."

Readers of Arnold's very remarkable book will remember the amusing and unforgettable applications which the author makes to his main principle of the distinction between means and ends. He divides the British people into three classes—barbarians, whose main interests are field sports; Philistines, who concern themselves with such machinery as that which he has described in the paragraph already quoted, and populace, whose ends in life are mainly shouting and beer. He points out that however high a value any of these classes may set upon those things for which they live, yet culture continually reminds us that these at their best can only be means to the real ends of living, and that when any one mistakes them for ends he has made a vital

and very serious blunder. It is a principle of the widest possible application, and almost all our intellectual and religious futilities are due to our ignoring of it. It is one of the most illuminating and comprehensive applications which have yet been given to Christ's own language, *What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?* In this lecture we propose to consider it in two main applications.

1. *Origins or facts.* In a great number of the controversies that have raged about religious questions it will be found upon examination that the heart of the dispute concerns the origins of the religious phenomena rather than the religious phenomena themselves. In all these lectures we have been dealing with religion as a fact of experience, and in the first of them we found that in religion as in science, it is absolutely impossible to go beyond experience and discover the ultimate metaphysical foundations of faith. In regard to authority our point was that the soul itself, in its response to the ideas presented to it by the Church and the Bible, recognized there facts which corresponded with its own spiritual life. We further found that the content of this was a God Who acted under our familiar moral standards, and Who revealed

Himself to the experience of man as the incarnate love in Jesus Christ.

All this gives us a clear and consistent knowledge so far as our own experience of the Christian ideas goes; but behind that knowledge and around it there arise many questions as to how these ideas began, and indeed as to how man himself began. This intrusion of the question of origins upon the living experience-knowledge of the soul, is the biggest red herring in the world. It has been trailed across the path of religious knowledge, and has led vast multitudes off the scent in their pursuit of truth. It was this that gave to the Pharisees in Christ's time their characteristic error. At one time they objected to Him on the ground that they knew whence He was. At another time they objected to Him because they knew not whence He was.[1] But in both cases they were too much interested in origins to face the religious truths with which He would have confronted them. A famous religious teacher of modern times has said in regard to the earlier presentations of the doctrine of evolution: "I care not whence or how I came, so long as I know whither I am going." He might have added: "So long also as I know that I have actually arrived, and

[1] John 17:27; John 9:29.

that truth has come to me in my own experience."

God has revealed Himself to man and in man, and the whole concern of the soul lies in its response to that revelation. Theology has too often concerned itself with the methods which God has taken for revealing Himself: but the real stress of importance lies not there, but in the reality and effectiveness of the revelation itself. If we are agreed about these, which give the daily course of life's voyage and its sure destination, we need not allow ourselves to be set quarrelling over detailed entries in the log. So it comes to pass that men who have a genuine religious experience have been perpetually engaged in unnecessary strife, while they are one at the depths. They have magnified these questions of origin and of method until they have altogether overestimated their value. Below all such diverse opinions their religious experience means the same thing.

Every one who is interested in church history will remember endless instances in which controversy about origins, while men were agreed about facts, has wrought havoc. It explains, for instance, much of the bitterness that has entered into the evolution controversy. There is a tale of an old lady in

the early Darwinian days, who was informed in the crude and popular language of those times that Mr. Darwin had discovered that we were all descended from monkeys. Her reply was, "Oh, let us hope that it is not true, but if it should turn out to be true let us by all means hush it up." But, unfortunately, there is no use in trying to hush up such theories, whether they be true or not. The troublesome scientific people seem to have no reticence at all, and they have very greatly vexed the mind of Christendom by their insistence upon such views as this. Surely it is evident that the worst they can do with their discussions can never reach further than the method of man's origin upon the earth. After all that they have to tell us is told, they neither kindle nor do they extinguish any light whatever upon the power that is behind his coming. That power may work regularly and slowly as they assert, or irregularly and suddenly as their opponents hold. But the whole interest and stress still lie, not on these methods, but upon the power behind them. The living will of God is as manifest in the faithfulness of natural law as it is in any *fiat* of creation, and the whole difference between the schools does not concern God at all but is only a question of His methods of operation. It is a question of

means and not ends. It is not a dispute about what God hath wrought, but about how He wrought it. The thing that concerns us as men, is only What man is here and now, and not the path by which he came here and became what he is. Whichever theory be true, Carlyle's words concerning Marie Antoinette hold equally good, "For if thy being came to thee out of old Hapsburg dynasties, came it not also, like my own, out of heaven?" It would seem that a legitimate and reasonable course to take is to content oneself with the facts of religious experience as we find them, and to leave God to choose His own method of bringing them about.

As regards that method, endless other controversies open out. We are told that man's belief in God originated long ago in fear of natural catastrophe, in the belief of ghosts, and so on. We have already stated that although these and such like crude stimuli may have been irritants which stirred up the primitive spirit of man to seek and partly to find God, yet our knowledge of God once established is a knowledge of fact which is absolutely independent of the stimuli which first of all suggested it. Again, in His progressive revelation, God may have used many methods of conveying truth to the growing

mind of man. He may have used either poetry or prose, either scientific or religious accounts of things, either history or gospel. Christ Himself chose the methods of parable and poetry for the communication of most of His truths, and that which He considered sufficient for the method of revelation in the New Testament is surely admissible also in the Old. Every reader will see how far-reaching the principle of means and ends is, when one applies it to one after another of the theological controversies that have so unnecessarily rent the Church. God's great end, so far as we are concerned, is the revelation of Himself to man. Any means that may serve that end is appropriate and legitimate. Questions of means are matters for argument, in which the ordinary evidence by which we decide secular things must be left to settle disputed points. But our religious life does not depend upon the answers which we may find to such questions. Think how tragic it would be if it did so depend.

> "I have a life in Christ to live,
> But ere I live it must I wait
> Till learning can clear answer give
> Of this or that book's date?"

Christianity deals both with questions of

origin and with questions of fact. With questions of origin it deals historically and dispassionately: with questions of fact it deals vitally and passionately. "To perceive that things are what they are and not what they came from—in other words to make a clear distinction between truth and genesis, origin and value—is the first and possibly the last lesson which the student of religious history ought to master."[1] For, most assuredly, things do not depend upon their beginning: they are what they are.

2. A second and even more important application of the principle of distinguishing means from ends, is that which may be called by the general designation of process and event. This is indeed the most vital of all such distinctions. In the course of these lectures we have been dealing both with processes and events in religion. In the lecture upon the Incarnate Love we saw how the supreme events recorded in the Bible intercept processes in the soul, and so authenticated themselves to the experience of man as fundamental truths. Within our own experience we find processes which we cannot understand. We see the soul blindly groping and blundering in

[1] Mackintosh, *Originality of the Christian Religion*, p. 4.

all directions, knowing that somehow or other it must go questing after the real truth of things, yet never finding light enough to see clearly. In the Gospel record we find stupendous events which take up into themselves these blundering processes of the soul. The incarnation, the atonement and the resurrection come to man as he is feeling his way about among his needs, explain these needs to him, and absolutely meet them all. They confirm his hope, they interpret and intensify all his best desires, and they send the whole process of life on its way confident, intelligible, sure of the future.

Now it so happens that according to the make of a man's mind, or the education to which it has been subjected, will be his preference for one or the other of these categories, process or event. On the one hand there are those who are interested only in the process, and to whom the event seems unnecessary and retarding. Such persons are indifferent to history. They tell us that it would matter nothing to them whether Christ ever lived or not. They are interested only in the workings of their own minds and in vague religious experiences which often are rather in the nature of emotion than of conviction. Such minds tend to lose themselves in the quagmire of

their own inner life. Their soul becomes a sort of domesticated sphynx, which is continually asking questions to which it receives no answer. Much of whatever results they arrive at, is borrowed from early memories of the very events that they are discarding; and the whole of their religious experience, detached from all historic conscience and interest, falls into confusion and leaves their religion invertebrate and weak. They are content with it so long as you do not ask them to examine it, but the first touch of inquiry leaves them at the mercy of every passing mood.

On the other hand there is a type of mind which occupies itself only with events, and knows nothing of processes in its religious life. Such factually-minded persons are concerned only with historic data and theological definitions. Their delight is in labels, pigeonholes, and such other methods of external exactitude. As to the being of God they will give you the Athanasian Creed, but they will never realize that God has revealed Himself within their own souls as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. With regard to Christ they will be satisfied when they have defined Him in some such formula as that of the two natures and one person, forgetting that that very

formula began the age-long quarrel as to what either nature or person meant in this connection. Such inquirers may indeed have a creed which satisfies the cravings of their own intellectual curiosity, but they will never know that vital sense of truth-seeking and finding which is the daily experience of those who bring all events into the light of spiritual processes, who die and live again with Christ, and find as the result that their life is hid with Christ in God. The factually-minded, being wholly dependent upon external evidence, will reach but a hard and objective external theology, and they will tend to drift away from actual experience altogether.

Altogether the rivalry is an unnecessary and unprofitable one, and the opposition between process and event is utterly vain. We have need of both, and both must be accepted in order to attain certainty and completeness in faith. The Bible tells us of both, and allows to each its fullest scope. In regard to miracles, for instance, there were the two views confronting each other in the time of Jesus. The factually-minded, whose representatives were the Pharisees of His day, demanded signs and wonders as mere objective facts and apart from any spiritual or moral significance that they might have. For them miracles

were of no use unless they were obvious and confessed breaches of natural law. There was in them a certain anarchism, an objection to law just because it is law, which has by no means wholly departed from their successors. Jesus took the miracles over into the region of process, did them and proclaimed them as the quite natural operation of a higher law of love. He refused to work signs and wonders at the demand of those who were interested merely in facts and not in meanings. When we read about the miracles of Jesus we feel that these are the things which we would fain do, and in a very slight degree can approach towards doing, when our love is strong enough and our heart sufficiently pure. There are those among men who can indeed work wonders even upon the flesh by love. But suppose the very God were incarnate in a man, the eternal love walking about in the lazar-house of the world, full of pity and affection, how sure and inevitable would be the sort of miracle which Jesus did. Miracles, seen as mere external facts, are but such shows as Pharisees delight in. Miracles which carry on the processes of the soul further than men can send them, are indeed convincing. Jesus refused at the Pharisees' bidding to do signs and wonders, but at the bidding of the needy

round about Him He did deeds that were congruous with His love.

In regard to the three great manifestations of God in Christ, which as events are cardinal matters of belief, each is in the clearest possible way represented in the Bible also in the category of process. In answer to those who would go everywhere searching for the living word of God, the apostle tells them to cease searching heaven and the deep, because "the word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart." The atonement, than which no event could be more definitely historical, is also regarded as part of the great scheme of life in such passages as that which speaks of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. As to the resurrection, upon which as an event so much stress has been laid, and around which so much controversy has been waged, the words of Jesus are very clear. On the day when Lazarus was dead, Martha said, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day," and Jesus answered her, "I *am* the Resurrection and the Life." These taken individually are sufficiently explicit, but there is a well-known passage in St. Paul, whose significance in this respect has been rarely realized, where he masses the whole three in one great combina-

tion of event with process: "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death; if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead." [1]

In this chapter we have sought to distinguish means from ends in our consideration of the data of our Christian faith. In the first place this has led us to distinguish origins from present facts. The whole study of origins, which has accounted for so great a part of theological controversy, is only at the best a study of means. After you have settled it in whatever way appeals to you as true, there still remains to be reckoned with all that which is most significant and vital. The thing to be accounted for, to be understood, and so to be treated as to make life religiously successful, is the present fact of faith in its widest sense. The things that we most certainly believe, the reason that we have for believing them in our own religious experience, these are the true ends of faith in every instance. It is indeed interesting to speculate as to how these things were achieved, to array evidence for or against the various theories of their origin, but that is entirely a subsidiary business. Thousands of

[1] Philippians 3: 10, 11.

people who have never given the slightest attention to these questions have yet felt the power of the thing itself. Tens of thousands of people who have no theory whatsoever concerning the origins of any religious phenomenon, are living daily by the faith of the Son of God, and conquering life in the virtue of that faith.

We passed on to consider the same distinction of means and ends in regard to process and event. The end of religion can never be a set of events which happened in Palestine or anywhere else at a certain date in history. These events, well-authenticated and of the most critical importance although they are, yet did not happen for their own sake, but for the sake of their effect upon the lives of those who believed in them. The most important thing about them is their religious value for those who take them over into the process of their own life. In other words, religion is for life, and not life for religion. The end of religion is not that man should think exactly accurate thoughts about a multitude of events which happened in human history: it is that men should have within them the saving processes of the life of God in the soul, which are seen most conspicuously in these historical events. Jesus Christ became man in order that we

through Him might attain to manhood. He died upon the cross that we might be made conformable to His death. He rose from the dead in order that we might attain to His resurrection, not merely in some distant future after we had died, but here and now. These were the means Christ took to accomplish the great ends of God in man. These ends may be summarized in two sentences. God's great end, so far as we are concerned, is to reveal Himself to man and to save him. Man's chief end is, in the great words of the Catechism, "To glorify God and to enjoy Him forever."

There is yet another application of the distinction between means and ends which demands our attention. In the lecture upon The Character of God it was argued that man's blunders in regard to the moral nature of God are due not so much to anthropomorphism as to the experience of apparently cruel or at least regardless treatment in the ordinary course of life. Providence is the word which man uses to denote this perplexing treatment of his life by God. Apart from those rare and exceptional instances of miracle which have broken through the otherwise uniform order of nature, we are confronted with a play of natural law which we can do nothing to

change. Our acts of disobedience to it or neglect of it are remorselessly punished. It knows no pity, nor does it make allowance for even the most unavoidable circumstances that would extenuate the blunders that bring us into conflict with it. In several passages we have said things about Providence which, although they are seldom spoken, are yet familiar sentiments in all our hearts. Age after age, man has been astonished and offended by this passionless mask of uniform law, and has cried out against it, or silently rebelled, or unwarrantably met it with resignation. The argument of these lectures has been that it is our duty to take our views of God, not from this external play of natural law which we call Providence, but from the revelations made within our own consciences and hearts by the great voices of the Bible and of Jesus Christ. These tell us of a Father Who loves us, Who understands and pities all His creatures, Who shares with them in the mystery of the incarnation and the atonement all the horror of the human tragedy, and Whose love is mighty to save to the uttermost.

Here then we have had two sources of information to which men have gone for their knowledge of their God. How are we to relate these one with another? And how are we

to explain their strangely diverse messages? On the one hand there are apparently two visions of God, one human and the other inhuman. Providence is the inhuman one which shows a world under law whose sweep is practically unbroken. Our Christian faith insists upon a human vision of God Who may and does reveal His love to the souls of His children in countless ways. It is a very bitter mystery and hopeless contradiction to many men and women, and most of those who have tried to solve it have given up all hope of understanding. Some of them have found in it a reason for turning away from faith in God altogether, while even the true believers have as a rule confessed themselves utterly baffled.

It is vain to seek for a perfect understanding of the ways of God in Providence. And yet we may find a hint which will not only illuminate us in our search after a rational theory, but may very materially assuage and comfort us in our bitter personal sense of the darkest elements in experience. What if Providence be a matter of means, while love is the ultimate end? We shall never begin to understand God until we very clearly grasp the one obvious certainty that God is forever working, not for the moment, but for the long result. Seeing the end from the beginning, His purpose

works towards that far-off goal, and does not swerve from its course. If we understood all, it would be plain to us that this is not only the better, but the only possible way, in which a universe can be managed. Even for our own sakes, one can see how absolutely necessary it is that there should be an order upon which man may count, and by which he may guide his course through life. Were our human history managed upon the principle of perpetually recurring interferences for the sake of this or that one of the countless myriads of men, it would be impossible for any one to accommodate himself to so unstable and irregular a world. Thus the means which God takes to carry on the story of human life upon the earth are not such as to satisfy the heart of man; and if we mistake these means for the ultimate end of God's purpose, and, as the phrase is, "judge God by Providence," we shall find ourselves in hopeless error.

The ends of God, His ultimate purposes, are never disclosed by Providence at all. Providence is but the machinery which works these out from age to age. We have to accommodate ourselves to it as best we may, and seek by all means in our power to understand the uniform play of nature, and to utilize its dangerous forces scientifically. But the essence

of all religion is a belief—well-founded in spiritual experience—that man is not only in contact with these means of God's purposes, but that a nearer relation may be established between each individual soul and the final ends of God's treatment of His creatures. We may commune with Him, spirit with spirit; and, through the revelation of Jesus Christ playing upon our own inner experience, we may reach the conviction that love is the true end and ultimate purpose even of the laws of nature. We may pass them by and leave them as the mysterious means which God has seen best to employ for the process of His whole creation, and with a leap of the spirit reach God directly in understanding and in love. This is the conclusion at which the writer of the famous hymn arrived in his couplet:

> "Behind a frowning providence
> He hides a smiling face."

It is the most courageous and also the wisest of all the acts of faith.

Mr. Chesterton has expressed this in a passage concerning nature, which is familiar to many of his readers, and I may be permitted to quote a few words in regard to this expression of his from an essay in another book: "Thus it comes to pass that in the midst of a

time resounding with pagan voices old and new, he (Mr. Chesterton) stands for an unflinching idealism. It is the mark of pagans that they are children of Nature, boasting that Nature is their mother: they are solemnized by that still and unresponsive maternity, or driven into rebellion by discovering that the so-called mother is but a harsh stepmother after all. Mr. Chesterton loves nature, because Christianity has revealed to him that she is but his sister, child of the same Father. 'We can be proud of her beauty, since we have the same father; but she has no authority over us; we have to admire, but not to imitate.'"

This is, I think, so far as any one can go in speaking of the inscrutable mystery of life. Every man and woman will at times be brought up against circumstances in their own experience which will make it extremely difficult for them to retain their confidence in the good-will of God. At such times few people will be able to argue matters out in cold blood and persuade themselves into peace. Yet there seems to be no other way than this distinction between the ends which God is determined to achieve, and the means which He in His infinite wisdom sees to be the best or the only ways for achieving them. Although at the moment it may be impossible for the sore

heart to grasp this and find in it any consolation, yet afterwards, in most cases, life will bring a larger understanding and a humbler patience. In any case, it seems that in the last analysis we shall find our highest wisdom in distinguishing God's great and tenderly loving ends, from the unintelligible means by which He works them out. If we could accustom ourselves to this distinction, it would be a very great aid to faith as well as to courage. The way of the Lord is often in great waters. Blessed is he that hath seen the end of the Lord.

"Against all dark thoughts engendered by our experience of Providence, faith sets its one assurance of a Love that is certain as life itself. He who wholly believes in and trusts that Love, may leave the mysterious silence and the apparent indifference to wait their explanation when Love shall find language in God's good time."

LECTURE VI

WHERE THE FAITHS OF MEN MEET

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There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification.—1 Cor. 14: 10.

WE have come in our final lecture to consider the bearing of all this upon the relation of Christianity with other faiths. Two extreme positions have been taken here. On the one hand every heathen thing has been condemned as being inspired by devils and wholly evil. On the other hand, there has been a tendency to consider all religions practically equal in value, their differences being only the casual and unimportant peculiarities imparted to each by local colour—differences not in any way essential, nor even seriously important. If, as we have contended in these lectures, the foundations of man's faith are to be found in his own religious experience, it might seem not unnatural to accept, as a consequence of that fact, the position that the best thing for the world would be a continuance of that faith which has naturally grown up in each part of it, under

whatever fuller light may be thrown upon it by a wider culture. This is very far from being our view, although we believe that God has not left any of His creatures without some true revelation of Himself, and therefore that it is impossible to look scornfully upon any interpretation of their inner life which men have found, even though it be apart from Christ's interpretation.

Let us take in the first place the instance of modern Oriental cults. There is an abundant supply of literature concerning Buddhism and the other religions of the East, and any one who will visit the best shrines where Buddhism and Shintoism are now practiced will certainly be filled with wonder at the nobility of the precepts, and the air of reverence and beauty, that have gathered round the holy places. Visit the temples in Nikko, where the curtain waves alluringly in front of that secret place wherein the eye catches only a glimpse of mother of pearl, and you will see a gathering of ancient and modern exquisiteness which will dazzle and delight you. The sunshine, broken by lattices which melt it into the most exquisite patterns, comes reflected from dark cryptomerias and the yellowish green of other trees, until it would seem as if the whole temple had been washed in molten emeralds.

Everything that can add to beauty and touch it with the romance of very ancient life goes to aid the effect upon the senses and the spirit. There is a magic there that seems to have power to draw out all that is wistful in the soul of the worshipper, like the similar wistfulness that fell upon the spirit of him who long ago watched the waving of the veil in the temple of Jerusalem and could not take his eyes off it for his longing to see what was within.[1] It is a land of dainty reticences, and religion has had much to do with these. If the temple be one of Shinto worship, the eye is directed upon the mirror of the oratory. When you ask the guardian he will tell you that God Himself cannot be seen, but dwells in the holy of holies: yet the Spirit of God is in the mirror, and in contemplating our own lives we may find Him. "When you worship, God is here." "If we seek Him we become one with Him."

In such circumstances it is impossible not to remember once more the oracle of Delphi, and the most famous saying of Socrates, *Know thyself*. Is not this but another way of stating the fundamental truth which we have sought to express in all these lectures, viz.,

[1] See the Record of Pseudo-Aristæus, professing to be the report of an embassy from Alexandria in connection with the foundation of the great Library.

that the ultimate basis of authority, and source of religious knowledge, is within the soul of man? Visit, on the other hand, a Buddhist temple, and as you pass through the great gate you may read these words in English:

"NOTICE: KOTOKU-IN MONASTERY, KAMAKURA

Stranger, whoever thou art, and whatever thy creed, when thou enterest this sanctuary remember that thou treadest upon ground hallowed by the worship of ages. This is the temple of Buddha and the gate of the Eternal, and should therefore be entered with reverence.

By Order of the Prior."

Take even the temples of Kwannon, that ancient Chinese god or goddess whose enormous wooden statues, in some cases carved in one piece from the stem of an ancient tree, represent the taking over into Buddhism of various Chinese idolatries. Round the main statue you will find others standing in the dim light, and beside one of these, in a shrine which is at least five hundred years old, there is this inscription:—"Jizo, a coming Buddha, yielded up His right to the eternal peace that He might save the souls of men, and renounced Nirvana to suffer with humanity for other myriad million ages." Now this statue is not,

as one might think, a relic of some ancient missionary enterprise of Christianity. It is an integral part of certain developments of Buddhist teaching, and no one can fail to see how near it comes to the essential idea of self-sacrifice which Christians express in the atonement.

These instances raise the very interesting question how far it may be possible to incorporate a pagan faith in the statement of the Christianity which is to supersede it. That there are elements common to the two, it is impossible to deny; but how far it is safe to utilize such elements by any sort of a blend between the former paganism and the new Christianity, is a different question. The opinion among missionaries themselves is divided. On the one hand, such instances as those which we have quoted appeal very strongly to the imagination of some, who would fain reinterpret the beautiful truths underlying paganism, and even incorporate some of its practice or ritual. This has been the policy of the Roman Catholic Church in heathen countries all along: and we cannot forget how great was the influence of the Eleusinian mysteries upon the earliest forms of the Christian sacraments.[1]

[1] See Hatch's *Hibbert Lecture.*

On the other hand, there are those who, in the spirit of the early Christians of the Roman Empire, consider all paganism a mere devil-worship, and who go about among the antiquities and beauties of the East with the avowed purpose of smashing Buddha. Sober opinion among missionaries seems to linger between the two extremes. On the one hand they are not blind to the fact that there is much which is precious, and which is ready for the use of Christ, in the practices and thoughts of other religions. On the other hand, they point to the fact that the populace is entirely ignorant of spiritual meanings in its own worship. To the average man, who worships at a temple in any of the Eastern cults, his religion consists entirely in the performance of a certain ritual into whose meaning he never dreams of inquiring. It seems reasonable to plead that it is hardly worth while for the Christian missionary to double his labours, by first instructing such persons in the meaning of their own Buddhism or Shintoism, and then afterwards proceeding to relate these teachings to Christianity.

While this and other such considerations should hold us back from any cheap and ignorant praise of the heathen cults, as being equal or superior to Christianity, it should certainly

suggest the desirability of all possible appreciation when dealing with an ancient faith. Let us remember what heathenism essentially is. For us, with our long Western tradition of Christian faith, it is, of course, a pitiable thing, very far inferior to even such attempts at Christianity as have been achieved in Christian lands. Yet something is to be said for idolatry if we would fairly judge those who have practiced it. Apart from the unlearned crowd to whom it is a mere unintelligible ritual, there are in every land great numbers of people to whom it really means the worship of ideas. Many of these ideas are indeed ideals. As has been already stated, man does not tend as a rule to worship that which his conscience and his intellect despise, but to construct ideals better than the powers discoverable in ordinary life, and to worship these. Thus idolatry may be essentially a kind of aspiration, and there is no doubt that in the minds of the better class of worshippers it has this quality. Brodie Innes expresses this very strongly: "I have never in one instance," he says, "found a man, woman, or child, who believed what the Comparative Religionists say he ought to believe . . . who thought that the physical sun in the sky was a god . . . but in every case the god was the

power behind. No man ever yet worshipped an idol or a fetish-stone, but many have believed that some spiritual power entered into the material form, changing its nature, and as it were working through it. It is difficult to draw any very definite line between this belief and the Christian sacramental idea." [1]

Idolatry may be either a retrogression or an advance. In the case of religions which have laid great stress upon ritual as a means of presenting and realizing spiritual power, there will be a tendency, as there certainly has been in the Roman Catholic Church, for the ignorant and vulgar to relapse from all spiritual conceptions and to regard the material elements of the ritual in a purely fetish manner. This has undoubtedly been the case in regard to Buddhism and to many other Oriental religions. In all such cases idolatry is, of course, a retrogression. But, on the other hand, if one contrasts an intelligent paganism with the mere brutality of very primitive races, it will be seen that paganism marks the dawn of ideals higher than those of the earth and of the flesh, and must be regarded as in every way, both intellectually and spiritually, an advance.

The greatest danger of the East to-day is

[1] *Old As The World,* p. 112, Brodie Innes.

not idolatry but godless civilization. There was a third play of Prometheus, besides the two which we possess, in which even Æschylus turned against Prometheus, and the very sea-nymphs whom he had succoured denounced his doctrine. In that conclusion of the whole matter Æschylus proclaimed that "the confessed evils of civilization are witness on Zeus' side against Prometheus." Take the case of certain ancient Eastern lands to-day, and think of the extremer forms in which their impact with the West has expressed itself. The new life rising there has in certain quarters openly summed itself up in the three demands for no government, no marriage, and no God. Can any one question the greater safety, not to speak of sanity and beauty, of the older faith?

But it is obvious that the God Who is to supplant the gods of yesterday in those countries which are to-day in their intellectual and spiritual birth-throes, must be a great God and not a small one. Something has been already said concerning this in the lecture upon The Character of God; but here it becomes apparent with a new force of conviction, that the God of to-morrow in all such lands must be divine upon the largest scale. If it be true that the curse of heathendom has been local

gods, it is incumbent upon those who would proclaim the God of Christianity to heathen lands to see to it that theirs is in no sense a local divinity. He must be largely conceived, interested not merely in individual conversions, but in all the secular life and well-being of mankind, great enough to cope with the international ideals of our time, and with the conception of progress which civilization introduces.

In this connection it is a matter of the greatest possible interest that at the present moment we are witnessing a revival, not only of Christianity, but of all religions, after the depressing period of the war. Brahmanism, for instance, is proclaiming that there are Indian people who feel it to be a better approach to the Divine, and a better fulfillment of the ends of life, for men "humbly to sit upon a prayer-rug and not always to be rushing about in motor-cars." There is a still more curious but very active attempt on the part of Buddhists in Japan and elsewhere to imitate certain of the methods of Christianity. Buddhist schools are being founded to rival the Christian Sunday-schools, and Christian hymns are being adapted to Buddhist worship, so that you may hear within a temple in Japan to-day the strains of "Buddha, lover of my soul." The effect pro-

duced upon the mind by all this, is that of a tendency, and indeed a systematic endeavour, to blend Christianity with other faiths, and to find in the composite worship something which will retain the best elements in each, and cease to be in any sense exclusive.

As we glance back through past periods of history, we can see at times the fanatical zeal with which the Christian religion repudiated all other kinds of worship. The furious antagonism of the crusades leads us back to the fixed conviction of the early Christians that all pagan deities were devils. And that again reminds us of the days of Ahab, king of Israel, who sought in his own way to blend the worship of Israel with the Baal worship of Phœnicia, and aroused the violence of Elijah, who would be satisfied with nothing less than the slaughter of the priests of Baal beside their altar. The present-day scientific spirit, and the higher developments of education generally, have inclined many cultured people towards a blending of the various worships of the world in one inclusive, though ill-defined and somewhat nebulous faith. Yet this is by no means the first of such attempts at synthesis. Indeed, there is an undated frog-charm that has been found somewhere in the East,

which shows within the crescent of the ancient moon-goddess the inscription *Jesus and Maria.*

Thus we are led back to the third and fourth centuries of the Christian era, when syncretism reached its fullest and most wide-spread development. The Roman Empire was showing signs of decay, and was indeed already hastening to its end. With it the largest promises, dreams, and hopes were perishing, and leaving men in a deepening sadness of spirit as they beheld, each in his own country, the dying agonies of the gods. Everything at that time was in an evening twilight. In some cases, like those of Palmyra and Jerash, they seem to have conserved only the merest externals as relics of a former faith now discarded. Men were busy making money and building up upon the earth the best establishments they could, although they knew that they could enjoy them but for a little time. In every land it was the same. Rationality was enlisted on the side of earth, and any idealism of whatever kind was relegated more and more to the sphere of poetic imagination. Yet there was that in the minds of all men which refused to part utterly from the dream that had been so wonderful. A great wistfulness characterized these centuries. Evander and his wife, typ-

ical of countless thousands of others, go to the oracle of Dodona to present this question, By what prayer or worship they may fare best now and forever? The craving for immortality reaches its climax, and everywhere men grudge the departure of that glamour and mystic fascination which cling about the ancient pagan world.

Meanwhile the Roman soldier marches through all the earth. He knows his Roman gods and finds parallels to them, sometimes fanciful but sometimes wonderfully exact, in every land into which he is led. Everybody knows that in the Great War there was a revival of prayer in the trenches, and it was the same in these ancient days. Face to face with immediate danger, men cry to whatsoever powers there may chance to be; even to very vague and legendary powers, upon the chance that there may be some realities corresponding to them. They see their neighbours employing different rituals and invoking gods by different names, but they recognize that the meaning of the cry is the same, and that the meaning of the god seems to be the same also. It was this that kept paganism such "an unconscionable time in dying," and it was such influences as these that unified it in the minds of men. Not only were the emotions of pagan worship

obviously deep and sincere; sometimes they contrasted favourably with those of current Christianity. In one of his letters the late Dr. Denny has said: "Pagan Rome impressed me much more than Christian—at least much more favourably. The pagans were not saints but they were not habitually engaged in doing infamous things in holy names, and it gives them an honesty and dignity even in their badness to which most of the popes can make no pretense." [1] All this throws strong light upon the syncretism of the time, and interprets the great court and vestibule at Baalbec, where men in the third century had collected a pantheon of no fewer than three hundred and thirty gods. On the one hand the idea seems to have been that there must be truth somewhere, and that although men were increasingly sceptical about the worth and efficacy of this and that divinity, yet by massing their gods in sufficient quantities they must almost certainly find some live potency of help. But besides this mitrailleuse theory of worship, whose principle was that if one barrel missed there were plenty of barrels left that might hit, there was another and a deeper fact about the court and vestibule of Baalbec and all it stood for. This is expressed in very remark-

[1] Letters, p. 154.

able words by that same Pseudo-Aristæus whom we have already mentioned: "For the God who sees and created all things whom they worship is He whom all men worship; and we too, oh king, though we address Him by other names as Zeus and Dis, and by these names they of old time not inappropriately signified that He, through whom all things receive their life and being, is the director and Lord of all."

Every reader must have been reminded by some of these later statements, of the speech of Paul to the Greeks in Athens recorded in the seventeenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. In that speech we see a Christian version of the endeavour to find a common element in all man's attempted worship. God Whom all men everywhere are ignorantly and blindly seeking, shut His eyes to the mistakes of ignorance, for He had made all nations to dwell in all the face of the earth that they should seek Him, if haply they might feel after Him and find Him. He went on to quote the pagan poet Aratus, who sang that we are also his offspring, and he rebuked men for imagining that He, in Whom we all live and move and have our being, was to be found locally in images of gold or silver. The significance of that speech for our present pur-

poses cannot be exaggerated. And it goes on to lead us directly back to Christ that we may find its confirmation in Him. Now it is to be noted that while Jesus said nothing directly along the lines of Paul's speech on Mars' Hill, yet, on the other hand, He spoke no word of bitterness about pagan worship. His only references to the heathen are one or two casual words which have no significance for our present purpose, such as those parables of the last judgment, in which the nations are judged upon common grounds of humanity which they share alike with Christians and with Jews. It is to be remembered that these words were spoken at a time when all the Jewish world was agitated about the golden eagles imported into Jerusalem, and when the worship of the Emperor of Rome and his gods was a point of current interest and keen anxiety.

The childhood of Jesus was spent in the highland village of Nazareth. When He was old enough to stray beyond the daily walk, hand in hand with His mother, to the village well, His first excursions must have been to a little hill whose summit is but ten minutes distant from the well. Looking north from that hilltop He saw the great road that led from

the sea to the furthest East by way of Safed, far-flung like a gigantic rifle-sling along the mountainsides. Back and forward along that road there passed every day long strings of camels. Those eastward-bound carried from the Phœnician seaports much merchandise gathered from all the shores of the Mediterranean, to be sold in the markets of lands across the desert. The west-bound caravans that crossed them, swung beneath heavy bales of silks and rare aromatic spices, and all manner of precious products from Persia and even India, to the Phœnician ships that swung at their anchors in Tyre and Sidon. Far thoughts must have followed them in both directions, as the child learned His first lessons about the breadth of the world of His day. Turning southward upon His hilltop, in the twilight of a frosty evening, He would see there, far below Him, the wine-red fringes of the great plain of Esdraelon, on which from immemorable generations the battles of the world had been fought, so that the colour of the plain must necessarily suggest a land soaked in ancient blood. Through the clear air a sound would reach Him of the clang of iron upon stone, as the sentries of Roman cohorts changed guard, or the armoured bands started upon the last stretch of their march to the gar-

rison at Capernaum. Nazareth in those days was to some extent what it still is, a crucible town in which many nations fused and blended; and the twofold vision of the hill-top must have supplied material for much thinking through His childhood and youth.

There came at last a day when, with all the kaleidoscope of life turning itself in His young mind, He felt that the time had come for gathering the varied knowledge into clear decision and a definite course. There had appeared upon the Jordan the figure of John the Baptist, who seemed to be a prophet born for leading men to great decisions, and for separating the chaff from the wheat, not only among men but among the ideas of his time. Jesus, with countless crowds of Galileans, visited the Jordan, and came back from His interview with John with the memory of divine acknowledgment which must be the master-thought of all His remaining years. But first He must choose His course, and the story of the three temptations seems to indicate a clear presentation to His mind of three alternative careers, among which He might select the one which would give Him scope for His divinely appointed mission. There was the career of commerce and of industry already graphically presented to His imagination by the caravans

on the Safed road—the world's way of transforming the precious stones of every land into bread for the merchant and the workman. There was the possibility of imperialism and military power and dominance. The vision of Rome with its emperor and its armies was one which must necessarily impress every active and virile mind of those times; and with His powers it would have been easy enough for Him to dominate the world by military force, and create an empire such as even Rome had never dreamed of. Or, if He felt an incongruity in such ambitions, if they jarred upon His sensitive religious spirit, there was the career of the religious teacher who by some astounding wonder might at a leap set Himself upon the throne of human faith. Such were the careers that were obvious and entirely practicable, and He rejected each of them in turn. It was not that in any of them there was that which He condemned as intrinsically wicked. It was enough for Him to know that they were not careers for Him, and that the line of the Father's purpose led Him into another road.

The road into which it did lead Him was, in comparison with those other careers, the simplest in all the world. He went back to Galilee, spoke now and again in the syna-

gogues, accepted invitations to feasts, associated with fishermen and peasants, and sent forth His messages quite casually as the occasion suggested. No life was ever simpler or more characteristically human than the life of those years in Galilee. They are, essentially, the days of the Son of Man. Hither and thither He wandered, by the seaside or upon the mountains, with the sun and the rain in His face, and the winds of God blowing upon Him. He noted the ploughman at the plough. He saw the life of peasants in their humble dwellings. For Him the lilies clothed themselves in more than regal splendour. To Him the birds of the air sang continually. On a visit to Jerusalem he was interviewed by night by Nicodemus, a wise old man, fettered and fossilized by much learning in the schools of the rabbis. His introductory words are laden with all the politeness, formality, and stupidity of a typical man of the schools. To all this ponderous artificiality Jesus answers with a word, reminding him that he had never listened to the wind.

The Beatitudes, rightly understood, show perhaps as strikingly as anything the bright and sunny spirit of those early days. *Blessed are the poor. Blessed are the hungry. Blessed are they that mourn*—it has been supposed to

proclaim a melancholy kind of blessedness. But then people who thus interpret it have forgotten the word that always follows, and which gives its meaning to every text—*for*. The hungry are not blessed because they are hungry, but because they shall be filled. The mourning are not blessed because they mourn but because they shall be comforted. The poor are not blessed because they are poor, but because they are heirs of a kingdom. And this exhilaration of the Beatitudes is characteristic of the whole spirit of the teaching. The wild joy of living is in it everywhere, the exuberance of a heart at leisure from the business of the world and eagerly rejoicing. Above all, love is in it, a wonderfully gracious and generous appreciation of man, woman, and child around Him, which finds its well-springs in a higher love, the love of the Father in heaven. With His Father He is in constant communion, and in that communion there is perfect satisfaction and rest. All the world is beautiful to Him, and all men and women are His brothers and sisters. He has the freedom of land and sea and air, loving them and the creatures that pass along their ways, as one who is everywhere at home. For certain days this brilliant ministry endured, falling like a splash of sunshine upon the gray

life of many a Galilean peasant, and astonishing His followers with its amazing naturalness and sweet gladness. It was the first phase of His ministry.

But there fell upon this glad path the shadow of the cross. Just as upon the garden of Joseph of Arimathea the shadow of the cross fell upon its appointed day, and swept round that garden, touching alike its flowers, its luxuriant pathways, and its new-cut tomb; so upon all thoughts of life and death, and upon everything that grew in the whole garden of the world, fell the shadow of the cross of Calvary upon the way of Jesus. Gradually it darkened on Him, and we see His references to it becoming more and more frequent as He proceeded. Incomprehensible to His followers, but unmistakably certain to Himself, it deepened steadily until it created for Him the second phase of His life and teaching. Then it brought with it the sense of pain in the heart of life, the sure and inevitable cross in the center of every banner that man may carry, either into festival or into battle. Joy that has no pain in the heart of it is but the laughter of fools. Success that wants that dark element of sorrow and defeat is but an elusive dream. Love that is all selfishness and has no sacrifice is the sorest delusion of all, and turns in-

evitably into loneliness or hatred. In a word the finished product of life is composite, and for the fusing of it there is necessary the bitter amalgam of pain. It claimed Him with a mysterious clutch. Sin was in that shadow as well as pain. To Him sinners were neither outcasts nor aliens as they were to the Pharisees. Their grim business concerned Him intimately and He made it His own, until at the last the dark element of suffering sprang at the throat of life itself, bearing with it the sin of all the world in the final death-grip of the cross of Calvary, whereon dying He mastered sin and death forever. This was the second phase of His ministry.

Let us turn our minds now to the world of Jesus' time and man's search for God in it. While it was various in detail, yet it grouped itself into two main types which comprehended every phase of it. On the one hand there was the Greek spirit and all that it represented in the world. To the Greek, God was practically the view. He lived in a land of hills deep in green acanthus. The gods loved the sunlight in which their worshippers built their houses, and the sunlight loved the sea, so that the poet could sing of the "Numberless laughter of the waves." Nay, the sun

was God to multitudes, and the worship of Apollo dominates alike the bright thinking and the happy emotions of the age of Pericles. In every wind among the reeds there was the sweet music of the pipes of Pan—that alluring and wonderful music that always whispered so much more than it told, and drew out the hearts of men and women beyond the dusty and prosaic earth into a wonderland of half-expressed desire and wistfulness. Harmony too was there, and balance, and rationality of thought,—a world not only exquisite but well-ordered, a world of essential sanity, and endless possibilities of delight.

Yet upon this lovely paradise of a world there fell strange shadows. The Greek knew nothing of the cross, and would have considered it foolishness if he had known. But all that the cross stood for, the sorrow and the darkness of mankind, fell upon his world also. The pipes of Pan, with all their exquisite suggestiveness, could yet play cruel music; and nature seemed to claim man for her victim when man daringly aspired to be her companion. And when this shadow fell upon the Greek he had no refuge anywhere in which to hide from it. He knew the truth that there is in beauty, the essential rightness of love and sunshine, yet these were not the portion of

any man beyond certain days and limits. So he longed for an immortality beyond the grasp of his faith, and sought with blind fingers, like a groping child, for the bosom of God whereon to lay his weary head and find love made perfect. But nature has no breasts of tenderness, and the groping man sooner or later was clasped by the lean fingers of death. Thus the world of the Greek was hopelessly unintelligible.

Such was the religion of the West. Contrasted with it, manifest in many forms, was another religion, which found sorrow and failure to be the most impressive facts of life. Pain and death, and all their train of disappointing experience, were accepted by the East and pressed to its bleeding heart. What else was there to do? The Greek, even after his disillusions, persistently refused to turn his eyes from beholding vanity. The Oriental proclaimed that all is vanity, even in his wine cups. Egypt, with its august and ancient religion of the dead, the whole Middle East with its perpetual sacrifices offered to bloody gods whom men tried to appease and yet never finally succeeded in appeasing, these were the immediate environment of Palestine. And in the still further East, connected with Mediterranean lands by many streams of commerce

and of travel, was that great and already long-established faith whose fundamental dogma was the illusion of experience and the evil of desire, whose hope and aim was the death of these in Nirvana.

Compare these two phases of faith with the two periods in the life of Jesus, and a close correspondence will at once appear. He took them both up into His hands, confirmed the essential truth of each, and flung away the error which bound man to despair. We have already said that Christianity is not a new faith rivalling the old. It is *the* faith, interpreting all the others and correcting them. Christ stands not for *a religion* but for *religion*, the finding of God and eternal life by men. There were no wholesome elements in the best thought of Greece which are not to be found in the Galilean Gospel of Jesus; while the dark tragedy that oppressed the eastern lands from Egypt to the Ganges and beyond it, found its match and its remedy in the Cross of Calvary. In the Galilean Gospel, the love of the Father and the promise of eternal life heartened men and fortified them for the bitterest disappointments that beset their appreciation of the world, and told them that the bright gospel of the sunshine and the wind would outlive the

catastrophe that threatened it in death and disillusion. To the Eastern He proclaimed that, dark though the tragedy of life might be, yet the Cross was mighty to turn it into salvation. He faced the bitterness of sorrow, death, and sin in His cross, as Buddha never did in his law of renunciation. Yet He believed, and taught men to believe, not in death as the ultimate word, but in life—a life that at last would be free from all precariousness, and would stand eternally secure from the attack of evil. Thus did Jesus make for the Greek the passing dream into a reality, and the passing beauty into an eternal splendour. Thus for the Oriental He faced sin and sorrow, but refused to admit their tyranny. Taking upon Himself that load in all its crushing sorrow, He redeemed man from his bondage and gave him immortal freedom. Thus did He combine within Himself all that any man had ever sought and found of God.

Here then is the true syncretism, which acknowledges and takes up into itself every worthy element in man's thought of God, and yet refuses to allow men to rest in faiths that had imperfectly expressed these. For this was Jesus Christ, complete and perfect man, Who had gone through the full circle of human ex-

perience, from the laughter of the child to the cry of the broken heart. He is man's brother, standing beside him in every phase of human life, undergoing and understanding it. He descended into hell, the hell of man's guilty conscience and despair, and having sounded the depths of sorrow which had haunted men with their evil dreams, He brought back from the ultimate abyss the great human heritage of an eternal hope. Complete and perfect man, and yet surely how much more! He was not as we are, East and West alike, the victim of life: He was its Master and its Lord. He brought all the power and wisdom and love of eternity, and set them free in full play upon the creatures and events of time. Surely this is very God come in the flesh, claiming all man's joy and sorrow as divine, directing men to find them in the life of God where alone they can dwell safely, revealing everything in the light of the eternal love as the only interpretation of any phase of human life.

There is abundant evidence that this was the effect of Christ upon the early Christians. Apart from the countless records of their faith and its tests both in living and in dying, we have a rejuvenated world rising from the ashes of the spent and outworn history of Greece and Rome. Pater in his *Marius the*

Epicurean has given us in a few sentences such a picture of that world as will send its message down through many generations. "What desire, what fulfillment of desire, had wrought so pathetically on these ranks of aged men and women of humble condition? Those young men, bent now so discreetly on the details of their sacred service had faced life and were glad. . . . Some credible message from beyond the flaming rampart of the world—a message of hope regarding the place of men's souls and their interest in the sum of things."

This then is the sum of the whole matter. The foundations of our Christian faith are laid, not in metaphysical abstractions, but in the deep, permanent, and essential facts of human nature, seen and interpreted in the light of Christ. That interpretation is not only convincing, it is inevitable. It takes up and fulfills not only the desire of man's heart but every fact of his human experience, which never finds itself until it finds itself in Him. He is indeed for us the image of the invisible. God Almighty is just like Christ, and there is nothing more to learn concerning God beyond Him. Christ comes to us, to take up alike the joy and sorrow of our daily lives, their love and pain, and to reveal them all as parts of

that life which is the life indeed. In Him we find God mighty to master sin and set us free from its dominion, strong to save to the uttermost because He loves to the uttermost. In Him we find the eternal God meeting us in all the ordinary byways of our journey through the days and years, and leading us at last to our places in the eternal life and love.

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